Queer Temporality and Literary Representation

A study on censorship, identity, and book bans in contemporary America

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Abstract

Book challenges and book bans are on a rise in the US, and especially queer young adult literature is targeted for being pornographic. US media outlets are circulating information about challenged books and the pro-banning movement, highlighting sexually explicit content as the culprit for several of the challenges and bans in recent years. This dissertation examines two challenged books, Maia Kobabe's graphic memoir *Gender Queer* (2019) and George M. Johnson's memoir *All Boys Aren't Blue* (2020), as well as the media coverage of the two books. Through a critical discourse analysis of the articles from the *New York Post*, *CNN*, *TIME*, and *Chicago Tribune* it was concluded that there is favoritism of the anti-banning movement in terms of representation, as the discursive tools appropriated in the articles display them as authoritative and believable. However, the media coverage distributes and maintains the harmful stereotype about the queer community being inherently hypersexual, which is presented as the main argument by the pro-banning movement for the initiatives for challenging and banning said books. Therefore, the overall media coverage is damaging the queer community. Both memoirs have incorporated narratological tools that enhance the ambiance of intimacy between narrator and reader, which creates a private sphere that affects the reader, forcing them to consider the narratively conveyed experiences and difficulties of young queer life described by Kobabe and Johnson. Furthermore, both memoirs incorporate visual components that enhance the notion of the books being representational narrative displays of queer life. Therefore, it can be concluded that the intention of both memoirs is not to provocatively display sexual content, but instead to present the reader with a representative and inclusive depiction of alternatives for sex and sexual identity situated outside of the heteronormative imperative. Lastly, a discussion of how the current moral panic stems from Protestant-Puritan convictions that constitute the backbone of American society is conducted. The current escalation of the book banning derives from the far-right organizations, which purport as grassroots movements and is in fact part of a larger tendency of backlashes – all of which seek to restrict information about alternative temporalities and civil rights for minorities.

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Introduction

"Censorship can be subtle, almost imperceptible, as well as blatant and overt, but, nonetheless, harmful" (ALA, "FAQ").

Literature is under attack in the US, as the rise of challenged and banned books is currently happening throughout several states - especially queer literature is caught in the crossfire. 1597 books were targeted through 729 challenges across the US in 2021. In comparison, only 273 books were challenged in 2020, thereby increasing the number of challenges and bans by more than 585% within a single year (ALA, "Top 10"). In the *New York Times* article "Book Banning Efforts Surged in 2021. These Titles Were the Most Targeted", Elizabeth A. Harris and Alexandra Alter explain that a surge of challenges and book bans is currently happening in the US. The level of challenged and banned books in 2021 is the highest since they began tracking challenged and banned books 20 years ago and today, "[most] of the targeted books were by or about Black and L.G.B.T.Q. people" (Alter and Harris, NYT). This indicates increased public defiance against queer-themed literature, especially queer literature aimed toward young adult readers available in schools and school libraries, and it is "[the] country's polarized politics [that] has fueled the rise" (Alter and Harris, NYT) of this surge in challenges and bans.

Nonetheless, the rise in book bans and challenges is not restricted to 2021 but remains relevant in 2022. In April 2022, *The Washington Post* published an article named "More books are banned than ever before, as Congress takes on the issue". In the article, Hannah Natanson explains how "[two] reports this week show the United States is facing an unprecedented wave of school book banning — spurring Congress to hold a hearing Thursday focused on the issue, which free-speech advocates warn will undermine democracy". Amongst the challenged and banned books, 41% feature prominent characters of color, while 33% are centered around LGBTQ thematics (Natanson). LGBTQ stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer and is an umbrella term utilized to describe those identifying outside of the heteronormative imperative. While the shortened acronym LGBT stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender, the labels LGBTQ and LGBTQIA+, as well as the word queer refer "to the larger community which includes various identities such as intersex, asexual, pansexual and attempts to include minority and non-normative gender and sexual orientation identities" (Jha and Palo 2). Queer is, therefore, a term used to describe a collective community, which is defined in opposition to the heteronormative and is characterized by its "movements within sexual identity politics and theoretical frameworks for understanding gender and sexuality" (Barber). From here on after, LGBTQ and queer will

be used interchangeably and will both signify a countermovement against the heteronormative imperative.

Quoting reports from the ALA, as well as PEN America, "a nonprofit that advocates for freedom of expression" (Natanson), Natanson explains how "an ascendant conservative-led movement is scrutinizing and questioning almost every aspect of public education". Right-Winged politicians and parents are objecting to minority-centered education, resisting the teachings of race and racism, gender, and sexuality, "alleging that some curriculums — meant to be inclusive of a larger range of identities — amount to liberal indoctrination and even sexual 'grooming'" (Natanson). The study from PEN America discloses how Texas is the state with the most book bans, totaling 713 books in 2021, while Pennsylvania is in second place with 456 book bans, and ranking third is Florida with a total of 204 book bans (Farid and Friedman).

However, the children and teenagers receiving this education, reading the challenged books in curriculums, disagree with the backlash from officials, politicians, and parents. Christina Ellis, a Black high school student from Pennsylvania, explained to Congress how "[banning] books of those of minority backgrounds and unique backgrounds silences their voices and erases their history [...] It's not indoctrination, it's education" (Natanson), while Olivia Pituch, a senior from the same county, who identifies as queer, stated that "she would have 'been able to embrace and love myself a lot earlier on' if she could have easily found books that featured people like her" (Natanson). To them, the challenged books become identifiable, as they provide a nuanced perspective on matters such as race, racism, gender, and LGBTQ. This feedback from students also corresponds with the statistics provided by the ALA, which disclose that parents instigate 39% of initiated challenges, whereas students only instigate 1% (ALA, "Censorship"). It is not the students that are dissatisfied with the books available in the school libraries - it is the parents.

To understand this increase in challenged and banned books, it is pertinent to distinguish between when a book is challenged and when it is banned. The ALA's Office for Intellectual Freedom (OIF) "receives reports from libraries, schools, and the media on attempts to ban books in communities across the country", whereafter they compile lists of the challenged and banned books to "inform the public about censorship efforts that affect libraries and schools" (ALA, "Challenged Books"). According to the ALA, "[a] challenge is an attempt to remove or restrict materials, based upon the objections of a person or group" and does not "simply involve a person expressing a point of view; rather, they are an attempt to remove material from the curriculum or library, thereby restricting the access of others"

(ALA, "FAQ"). When a book is challenged, it is questioned for its content and whether this content is suitable for the intended readers.

When a book is banned, it is the consequence of the challenge - it is completely removed (ALA, "FAQ"). The banning of a book can therefore be understood as when a book "has been prohibited or suppressed by ecclesiastical or secular authority because its content is considered objectionable or dangerous, usually for political and/or social reasons" (Aucoin 1). Many books are challenged, but not all are banned. According to the ALA, "parents challenge materials more often than any other group" and the top three reasons for challenging books are that the material is sexually explicit, contains offensive language, or is unsuited for any age group (ALA, "FAQ").

In the article "Censorship in Libraries: A Retrospective Study of Banned and Challenged Books" (2021), Jessica Aucoin accounts for the development of challenged and banned books throughout the last 30 years to potentially disclose any changes within the books challenged and banned. Aucoin discovers that there has been a surge in certain themes used as reasoning for challenging or banning a book, highlighting books containing sexually explicit content and LGBTQ-themed books as those with the highest increase from previous years (8). In terms of targeted audience for the challenged and banned books, young adult literature is by far the most challenged category (Aucoin 6). These tendencies correlate with the surge of challenged and banned books happening in America as of 2021 and 2022, where the top three banned books in 2021 are young adult queer-themed books.

Young adult literature (YA) is at its core defined as books directed at adolescent readers, and the genre has experienced a peak throughout the last 20 years, making it one of the most popular literary genres (Gruner 5). Moreover, queer centered young adult literature has also experienced an influx, where the consensus is that queer YA offers "much more realistic and positive representations of LGBTQ teens than in past decades" (Lewis 53), thereby making YA a literary genre that is working towards a more inclusive and positive representation of adolescent identity and self-discovery (Lewis 54).

On the list published by the ALA of the top ten most challenged books in the US in 2021, four books are targeted for their LGBTQIA+ content. Furthermore, seven books are labeled as displaying sexually explicit content. Three of the four books tagged as LGBTQIA+ are also described as being sexually explicit and those three books are the top three books on the list. A common denominator for all three books is that they are all targeted toward young adult readers, and this aligns with the tendencies for challenged and banned books in

contemporary US society. Of the top three books[1], two books are labeled as memoirs: Maia Kobabe's graphic novel *Gender Queer* (2019) and George M. Johnson's book *All Boys Aren't Blue* (2020) (ALA, "Top 10").

As a genre, memoir is defined by its ability to convey identity through life-centered narratives, where "life narrative is essential to - *built into* - the formation of individual identity and human relationships" (Couser 25). There is a strong connection between the narration of identity and memoirs as a genre, conveying the nonfictional lives and experiences of real-life people, "[thus] the genre has an identity claim at its core: by definition, a memoir [...] purports to represent its author and the extra-textual world more or less directly, in a way that fiction, no matter how historical or autobiographical, does not claim to do" (Couser 81). When reading a narrative that is characterized as a memoir, it is possible to draw a direct connection between the told story and the storyteller. Lastly, contemporary memoirs are "by definition always topical" (Couser 56), therefore centered around one or more themes, creating an overall narrative arc in the memoir. This characteristic correlates with the memoirs of Kobabe and Johnson, as they are both focused on queer life, gender, and identity in a heteronormative society.

Gender Queer by Maia Kobabe is listed as the number one challenged book in 2021. Published in 2019, this graphic novel is a memoir centered around sexuality and gender identity in a queer context (Alter and Harris, NYT). The objections to the memoir are primarily centered around the sexual content of the book, which for instance depicts masturbation and oral sex, but according to Kobabe "many of the challenges stem from the memoir's frank discussion of gender fluidity" (Alter and Harris, NYT). Thus, there is a discrepancy between the challenges from the public, which are focused on the sexually explicit content, and Kobabe's interpretation of the book, namely the focus on queer gender identity.

In third place on the list is George M. Johnson's memoir-manifesto *All Boys Aren't Blue*. Even though Johnson has received praise for writing a memoir that provides an "unflinching and at times exuberant look at the challenges and joys of growing up Black and queer" (Alter and Harris, NYT), the book is challenged and banned due to its "LGBTQIA+ content, profanity, and because it [is] considered to be sexually explicit" (ALA, "Top 10"), where the reaction from the public is mainly focused on the display of oral and anal sex, as

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[1] The 2nd most challenged and banned book is *Lawn Boy* by Jonathan Evison (ALA, "Top 10").

well as sexual assault in the book, instead of the representation of queer identity and gender that the book offers to the reader.

Even though they were published in respectively 2019 and 2020, Johnson's *All Boys Aren't Blue* and Kobabe's *Gender Queer* are both still heavily discussed in US media outlets because of their challenged content. The *New York Times* published an article in May 2022 named "How a Debut Graphic Memoir Became the Most Banned Book in the Country", wherein they discuss Kobabe's graphic novel and the repercussions the book has received from the public, explaining that "the book's frank grappling with gender identity and sexuality began generating headlines around the country" after the publication in 2019 (Alter). As a result, "[dozens] of schools pulled it from library shelves. Republican officials in North and South Carolina, Texas and Virginia called for the book's removal, sometimes labeling it 'pornographic'" (Alter). The pushback from the public centers around the sexual content of the memoir, while simultaneously claiming that the criticism has nothing to do with Kobabe's story or identity (Alter). Critics of the book have focused on "a handful of explicit images that illustrate Kobabe's evolving understanding of gender and sexuality as a teenager and young adult, including a drawing of Kobabe and a girlfriend experimenting with a strap-on sex toy, and another of Kobabe fantasizing about two men having sex" (Alter). However, in Kobabe's own words, the intent of the memoir was a book directed at young adult readers "who had also wrestled with gender identity, and to friends and family of nonbinary people" (Alter). Even though three years have passed since *Gender Queer* was published, there is still an inconsistency between Kobabe's intent for the book and how it is presented in mainstream media outlets in the US.

In February 2022, *NBC News* published an article discussing the current surge of book bans across conservative US states. In it, they explain how George M. Johnson's young adult memoir appeared on The *New York Times* bestseller list in 2022 for the first time since publication, as well as how the "spike in sales was undoubtedly fueled by the publicity the title received after being banned in public libraries and schools in at least 19 states" (Prager). However, even though the increased interest from the public has boosted sales of challenged and banned books, here amongst Johnson's *All Boys Aren't Blue*, Johnson is not content with the situation. As Johnson explains, "making The New York Times bestseller list is bittersweet" (Prager), because those who may not be able to afford the books, i.e., students and teenagers in general, are the ones targeted by these challenges, as their access via school libraries is being limited (Prager). In another article from *NBC News* titled "Here are 50 books Texas parents want banned from school libraries" (Hixenbaugh), *All Boys Aren't Blue*

is listed as a book several Texas districts tried to ban in 2021. The reason behind the challenges is rooted in the sexual content of the book: "This memoir by a queer Black author was flagged for removal by a group of [...] parents because it includes descriptions of molestation and sex between men" (Hixenbaugh). The numbers of challenged books are at a record high in Texas and the primary reasons for the removal requests are rooted in topics such as racism, gender, and sexuality (Hixenbaugh) - all central topics in Johnson's memoir - thereby making it contested to public authorities, as Texan state officials move for a complete ban of the book in school and school libraries.

Considering the recent tendencies for challenged and banned books, where the challenges and bans of books centered around sexual content and LGBTQ are on the rise, we have chosen Kobabe's *Gender Queer*[2] and Johnson's *All Boys Aren't Blue*[3] as the primary texts for this master thesis. Both books align with the movement seen in US culture as of 2021 and 2022, as they are both challenged and banned due to LGBTQ content and sexually explicit content. They are both furthermore targeted at young adult readers and defined as memoirs. Lastly, they both feature in the top three of ALA's list for the ten most challenged and banned books of 2021, thereby making them continuously relevant in a contemporary US cultural context. They are still massively discussed in various media outlets, with more states moving for the complete removal of both books from schools and libraries. *Gender Queer* and *All Boys Aren't Blue* are therefore deemed representative of queer young adult memoirs and we consider these two memoirs as significant contenders in an analysis and discussion of the discrepancy between queer representation and literary restrictions in contemporary US culture.

The two queer memoirs George M. Johnson's book *All Boys Aren't Blue* and Maia Kobabe's graphic novel *Gender Queer* are both contemporary portrayals of young queer identity. Furthermore, various US media outlets play a significant role in upholding a harmful discourse about queer gender identity created by the pro-banning movement. Both Johnson's novel and Kobabe's graphic novel are banned in several US states due to their queer content, and both books are furthermore extensively discussed in various US media outlets. The media portrayal of these books and the queer community in general is largely based on damaging stereotypes created and maintained by the pro-banning movement. Even though the medium used for conveying the message differs between Johnson and Kobabe's books, prose versus a

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[2] Kobabe uses Spivak pronouns - e, eir, eirself (Kobabe 188-190).
[3] Johnson uses they/them/themselves pronouns (Vassell).

graphic memoir, both books contribute positively to the overall discourse of queer gender identity in contemporary literature, and this, therefore, places them in direct opposition to the media's representation of the queer community.

Literature review

It is apparent that the field of gender identity has been heavily investigated from various scholarly perspectives, and this literature review is therefore organized into subsections that address each of these aspects. The first apparent perspective is the correlation between queer stereotypes and racial minorities. The focus of the scholarly work is on how this affiliation with two minority groups intersects two otherwise separate minority groups, as well as the creation of connections between stereotypical thinking of each group. Lastly, it explores the implications that follow for individuals who identify with both groups (Jones; Kumashiro). Jackson Jones's article "Dangerous Intersection: Combating Stereotypes from a Queer Muslim Perspective" and Kevin K. Kumashiro's article "Supplementing normalcy and otherness: Queer Asian American men reflect on stereotypes, identity and oppression" both conclude two distinct implications for queer racial minorities - namely a racial power hierarchy within the queer community itself and the double oppression queer racial minorities experience due to their affiliation with both groups.

The first implication is found within the queer community itself, where it is evident that there is a power hierarchy present that favors white queer individuals over people of color or other ethnicities (Jones 13). Jones concludes that the queer community discriminates against queer individuals who belong to a racial minority - placing them at the bottom of the hierarchy or, as Jones phrases it, places "white queers as the figureheads of our movement" (13) and positions the racial minorities at the back when protesting for queer rights. So, despite the queer community breaking with the heteronormative imperative on multiple levels, it sustains the normative power hierarchy (Jones 13).

The second implication is that by identifying within two minority groups, one's position in society is twice as oppressed "on the basis of both their race and their sexual orientation simultaneously and, thus, are doubly oppressed or doubly marginalized" (Kumashiro 491). This leads to the discrimination being twofold, as it is carried out by both the heteronormative imperative and by one's own racial or religious community, as queer gender identity conflicts with their belief systems (Kumashiro 496).

Another scholarly aspect is the commodification of queer identity and the adoption of their signs in mainstream society. Michael J. Yaksich is one of the researchers who have

investigated this and found that "consumers have become attracted to 'exotic' or culturally related trends, by extracting and consuming styles and characteristics associated with marginalized cultures" (25). It is plausible to assume that this is beneficiary for the queer community as it would result in a greater acceptance, but instead this leads to "easy to consume products and images that allow the dominant culture to utilize stereotypes in constructing lifestyles' for consumption" (Yaksich 26), meaning that the commodification is damaging in terms of acceptance of queer culture and identity.

In his article "Selling Queer Rights: The Commodification of Queer Rights Activism", Laurence Pedroni explains that it is the commodification of queer culture that has led to the change in legislation, rather than a concern for equal civil rights (21). Both Yaksich and Pedroni conclude that the investment in granting queer people basic civil rights and protection is motivated by the interest of capitalism, as "economists have argued that same-sex marriage provides economic benefits for states that legalize them" (Pedroni 27) and thus the politicians cater to capitalism rather than people. This was also hinted in their amicus brief to the Supreme Court, where they "listed economic reasons as part of their motivation" (Pedroni 33) rather than them feeling a social responsibility for the queer community. As a result, it leads to negative implications for the queer community, as "commodification prefabricates culture into easy to consume products and images that allow the dominant culture to utilize stereotypes in constructing 'lifestyles' for consumption" (Yaksich 26). This could then result in fixed perceptions and definitions of the queer community, which will likely be created by the majority, and thus puts the identifiable queer individuals in the limelight - resulting in a narrow representation of the queer community, as many queer individuals would be excluded from public representation.

Queer memoirs as a genre have also been investigated, and the focus of the research has primarily been on the differences between queer memoirs and heteronormative memoirs. In her dissertation "The Self-Identity Journey of Non-Binary Protagonists in *Freshwater*, *Sissy* and *Gender Queer*", Karolína Zlámalová investigates the focus areas of queer memoirs compared to heteronormative memoirs and what the impact might be on the memoir genre altogether. She investigates the language used within three queer memoirs and discovers that there is a greater focus on the language used to define oneself than in any heteronormative memoir. Zlámalová concludes that "the nonbinary memoir is a new and emerging genre within the queer memoir and within the postmodern memoir in general" (94) and further adds that its contribution "will likely lie precisely in the challenges to norms of both gender and identity, and to the queer memoir as we know it" (94).

Both George M. Johnson and Maia Kobabe's queer memoirs targeted audience is adolescents, which falls within the age spectrum of young adult literature (Aucoin 10). The correlation between YA literature and queer memoirs extends beyond the age spectrum into the realms of identity creation and sexuality (Wells 4-5), as both genres encircle these themes. The last notable correlation between the two categories is that the two genres both projected an increase in being challenged and banned. Jessica Aucoin maps out the progression of the banning and challenging of books in the US from 1990 to 2019. In this, similarities in the development of YA and queer literature become clear, as it was "concluded that the Young Adult category was most challenged" over the last 30 years (Aucoin 10). During that same period, a considerable increase in "bans/challenges of LGBTQ+ material was seen during this study. Bans and challenges on LGBTQ+ themes more than doubled from the 1990s and 2000s list to the 2010s list" (Aucoin 11). She furthermore suggests the rising popularity and more publication of queer themes books as a possible explanation for this increase (Aucoin 11).

In her article, "'Gays flaunt their sexuality'; The myth of hypersexuality' (2010), Kristin J. Anderson presents her arguments for the myth of the queer community being inherently hypersexual as rooted in heterosexism and homophobia and in the belief that being queer can be reduced to the act of sex. Through her research, she finds that it is the heterosexuals who flaunt their intimate relationships in public spaces without considering the possible implications of this, and "declaring that homosexuals flaunt their sexuality is a declaration of heterosexual privilege. The implication is that heterosexuals are normal, that their romantic and sexual behavior is normal and natural" (Anderson 222). The heterosexual privilege extends beyond not having to worry about displaying one's partner and being affectionate with them in public, it is also the privilege of not having their whole person reduced to a single aspect of their lives (Anderson 222). A last and very essential finding in her studies is the crucial role the mass media has in maintaining and broadcasting harmful stereotypes: "Their ideas come from secondary sources such as mass media and other homophobes. Therefore, their ideas about homosexuality are based on stereotypes and myth" (Anderson 219). Mass media consistently brings forward a certain perspective and this is significant, as it highlights how the media adopts an intentional representation strategy when portraying minorities. News outlets affect the perspective from which the public forms and adopts opinions about subjects and individuals.

Anderson's research elucidates a significant aspect of maintaining harmful stereotypes about the queer community, namely the mass media's role and responsibility. The

two articles, "Media Representations of Bullying Toward Queer Youth: Gender, Race, and Age Discrepancies" (Paceley and Flynn) and "Who Defines Gender Diversity? Sourcing Routines and Representation in Mainstream U.S. News Stories About Transgenderism" (Capuzza) investigates the media coverage of queer individuals but with different themes in focus. Paceley and Flynn focus on "online news media's portrayal of the gender, race, and age of bullying victims" (340), while Capuzza examines "documents and assesses sourcing patterns used by U.S. journalists in news stories about gender diversity" (115). Interestingly, both articles come to the same conclusion - that there is a substantial underrepresentation and lack of inclusion of queer individuals in the media coverage. When included, queer individuals are represented superficially and often stereotypical, not catering to the many complex aspects of queer life, but simply utilized to underpin preexisting knowledge and understanding of queer individuals (Capuzza; Paceley and Flynn). So, the one-dimensional representation perpetuates the already existing stereotypes, rather than concentrating on the complexity of living a queer life in a heteronormative setting.

Our contribution to the scholarly field will add a further dimension, as it will combine the investigation of stereotypes, textual studies of banned queer memoirs, how they represent themselves, and if they are contributing to the conversation in terms of a more diverse and complex representation, or if they are unintentionally drawing on harmful stereotypes instead. It will also include the perspective of the mass media's representation of the books and the queer community, as well as their responsibility in possibly maintaining, creating, and distributing damaging stereotypes.

Theory and method

The theoretical and methodical matrix for this dissertation will encompass theories about queer identity, stereotypes, and narrative representation, as well as methods that operationalize critical discourse analysis and multimodal discourse analysis. For theories, the following will be applied: Judith Butler's concept of queer sex and gender, Richard Dyer's concept of stereotypes, Stanley Cohen's concept of moral panic, as well as Michael Kearns' concept of rhetorical narratology, and Susan Lanser's concept of queer narrative voice. The methods employed will be David Machin and Andrea Mayr's take on critical discourse analysis, as well as Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen's multimodal discourse analysis.

Structure for theory and method

George M. Johnson's book *All Boys Aren't Blue* and Maia Kobabe's graphic novel *Gender Queer* are both centered around queer identity and queer gender. It is therefore pertinent to investigate queer gender and identity through an academic theoretical scope to further the understanding of the intended discourse of both books, as it will help elucidate potential discursive power structures tied to the representation of queer gender identity in YA literature. To do this, it is relevant to include Judith Butler's theory of sex and gender in a queer perspective, as it will allow for in-depth analysis and discussion of the representation of queer sex and gender in both texts. Butler will function as the overall theoretical lens for understanding the representation of queer in the two memoirs, as well as the representation in the media coverage.

Because queer is understood in opposition to the heteronormative imperative, queer representation can be tainted by harmful stereotypes that dictate the public perception of the queer community. Richard Dyer's notion of stereotypes will provide a theoretical framework for identifying and discussing possibly harmful stereotypes about queer gender identity. The inclusion of Dyer's notion of stereotypes in combination with Butler's concept of queer gender identity will provide a platform to investigate the representation and potential implications for the queer community represented in the books and media coverage.

The creation of stereotypes is deeply intertwined with the media's chosen representation of the queer community, as they sustain the power for formulating a public opinion about a group. Stanley Cohen's concept of moral panic will therefore be used as a tool for examining the impact of the stereotypes already established. Dyer's theoretical scope will provide a platform for identifying and discussing queer stereotypes, as well as how they are constructed, and Cohen's concept of moral panic will allow for a further investigation of said stereotypes in relation to the media, namely the media's responsibility in the creation of stereotypes and how they enable a further escalation through the manifestation of moral panic.

Michael Kearns' concept of rhetorical narratology, more specifically his notion of narrative voice, will be utilized to investigate and discuss narratological choices in the two memoirs and how these narrative choices may enhance representative elements tied to queer identity. Furthermore, Susan Lanser's notion of queer narrative voices will be used to further examine explicit queer narrative voices and how they might impact the interpretation of the narratives.

David Machin and Andrea Mayr's contribution to the field of critical discourse will function to operationalize the theoretical framework of queer gender identity and stereotypes. More specifically, their approach will allow for an in-depth investigation of the articles published by various news outlets, as the approach focuses on the author's deliberate choices for enhancing specific aspects of speakers and statements. Machin and Mayr's method focuses on the relationship between author and reader and what impact the choices made by the author have on the reader's perception, thereby making it ideal for investigating the media's presentation of the two queer memoirs.

Moreover, both memoirs utilize visual components discursively to express various aspects of queer gender identity. Kobabe's *Gender Queer* is labeled a graphic novel, thereby making the visual aspect of the novel a vital component, and the discursive focus of the novel is therefore visually founded. Johnson's *All Boys Aren't Blue* also incorporates visuals, but they are only supplementary to the written story and therefore not the primary focus of the narrative. Nonetheless, it is imperative to include an analysis of the visual elements in Johnson's memoir, as they are contributory to the overall interpretation of the memoir. Because both books incorporate visual components, it is essential to utilize multimodal discourse analysis, as it will help analyze and discuss the visual aspects of the two books. For this purpose, Kress and van Leeuwen will be the starting point for the multimodal approach and their three-legged model of respectively representational meaning, interactive meaning, and compositional meaning will be the main methical tool for analyzing multimodal discourse in the two books, as it will help include several aspects of visual discursivity in relation to queer representation.

Queer representation

In the book *Bodies That Matter: On the discursive limits of 'sex'* (1993), Butler discusses the discursive limitations associated with sex and gender. According to Butler, sex is not an individual choice and can therefore not be removed from the materiality of the human body (*Bodies* xii). Instead, sex must be viewed as an output of the repetitive nature of society. Sex and gender are both constructed and sanctioned through cultural and societal practices centered around heterosexuality (Butler, *Bodies* xxiii – xxiv) - a practice Butler calls *the heterosexual imperative*. Heterosexuality becomes the focal point for all societal, political, and cultural constructions for sex and gender, thereby making heterosexuality the foundation and, as a result, anything other than heterosexuality, the unmarked other: "[T]he regulatory norms of 'sex' work in a performative fashion to constitute the materiality of bodies and,

more specifically, to materialize the body's sex, to materialize sexual difference in the service of the consolidation of the heterosexual imperative" (Butler, *Bodies* xii).

One of Butler's main propositions is that sex cannot be removed from gender. Instead, sex is absorbed and replaced by the cultural and social meanings of gender:

> If gender consists of the social meanings that sex assumes, then sex does not *accrue* social meanings as additive properties but, rather, is *replaced by* the social meanings it takes on; sex is relinquished in the course of that assumption, and gender emerges, not as a term in a continued relationship of opposition to sex, but as the term which absorbs and displaces 'sex,' the mark of its full substantiation into gender or what, from a materialist point of view, might constitute a full *de*substantiation. (Butler, *Bodies* xv)

Sex and gender become one entity, enhancing how the repetitive cultural performance of gender is dominant in a societal context as opposed to the biological sex. The gendered performativity connected to the heterosexual imperative is not performed by the subject itself, but instead by outside sources surrounding the subject (Butler, *Bodies* 60). This means that the subject is sexed through the regulations and repetitions of heterosexualized social and cultural practices in society. Therefore, the performative nature of sex and gender cannot be understood outside the process of regulatory norms associated with the heterosexual imperative, and the subject will thus always be regulated through this repetition, instead of being the instigating force that controls the performance: "This iterability implies that 'performance' is not a singular 'act' or event, but a ritualized production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraint, under and through the force of prohibition and taboo, with the threat of ostracism and even death controlling and compelling the shape of the production, but not, I will insist, determining it fully in advance" (Butler, *Bodies* 60). Sex and gender are not individual choices, but instead performative instances connected to the dominant heterosexual norms of society. The regulations of a given society will dictate how gender, herein sex, must perform to be accepted within its population.

Butler furthermore states that heterosexuality operates through a governed production of what she calls the "hyperbolic versions of 'man' and 'woman'" (*Bodies* 181), claiming that this is a compulsory performance that all of society is submitted to (*Bodies* 181). This heterosexual performance is tied to gender norms, as "[g]ender norms operate by requiring the embodiment of certain ideals of femininity and masculinity, ones which are almost always related to the idealization of the heterosexual bond" (Butler, "Critically Queer" 22). Anyone performing and identifying outside of these ingrained, binary heterosexualized

gender productions in society therefore becomes alienated and exiled. If the associated and performed sex and gender does not conform to the binary juxtaposition of male and female, it will be perceived as abnormal and that can have malignant consequences for the individual in question. As Butler states, "no 'one' […] takes on a gender norm. On the contrary, this citation of the gender norm is necessary in order to qualify as a 'one,' to become viable as a 'one,' where subject-formation is dependent on the prior operation of legitimating gender norms" ("Critically Queer" 23). Gender norms dictate the successes and failures of human life, requiring a complete submission to the heterosexual imperative to be perceived as a viable human being in a societal, cultural, and political context.

Language is also a constituting factor when constructing and expressing gender in a societal and cultural context, and Butler argues that discourse is a symbolic act that can be either harmful or beneficial. She questions whether there must be an executive power in the form of a subjective 'I' or 'we' who enacts or performs gender if gender is solely a construct (*Bodies* xvi). Butler concludes that:

> [I]f gender is constructed, it is not necessarily constructed by an 'I' or a 'we' who stands before that construction in any spatial or temporal sense of 'before.' Indeed, it is unclear that there can be an 'I' or a 'we' who has not been submitted, subjected to gender, where gendering is, among other things, the differentiating relations by which speaking subjects come into being. (*Bodies* xvi)

The subject does not proceed nor follow the process of gendering but instead emerges within the matrix of gender relations (Butler, *Bodies* xvi). Gendering must be perceived as a cultural process instead of a human process, and it is thus possible to perceive the cultural gendering as emerging prior to that of 'humanness' (Butler, *Bodies* xvii).

Concerning the matrix of gendering, naming is a vital component for enforcing this gendered perception of individuals. The restrictions and regulations associated with naming within the norm contribute to the field of discourse and power, as it upholds, delimits, and sustains normative practices associated with the heterosexual imperative (Butler, *Bodies* xvii). Sex is always structured around the repetition of hegemonic forms, and this productive repetition can be read as a discursive performance (Butler, *Bodies* 70). As Butler describes it, "[discursive] performativity appears to produce that which it names, to enact its own referent, to name and to do, to name and to make" and this correlates with how a performative function to construct what it declares (*Bodies* 70). This discursive performativity can be understood as performative acts, and these performative acts

are forms of authoritative speech: most performatives, for instance, are statements which, in the uttering, also perform a certain action and exercise a binding power [...] The power of discourse to produce that which it names is thus essentially linked with the question of performativity. The performative is thus one domain in which power acts *as* discourse. (Butler, "Critically Queer" 17)

When repeated, these performative acts constitute discursive productions that wield societal power, but they are only effective in producing social and cultural regulations when combined with a set of repetitive and hence sanctioned set of conventions (Butler, "Critically Queer" 17). The power is therefore not situated within a single individual, but instead lies in the matrix of discursive performative acts and cultural, political, and societal normative regulations (Butler, "Critically Queer 17). The power lies within the governing societal structures that also control the normative regulations associated with sex and gender. The heterosexual imperative becomes the ultimate governing force, which in turn regulates the individual, as well as their gender identity and -expression.

Butler connects the term queer with these discursive, normative performative acts, where "[t]he term 'queer' emerges as an interpellation that raises the question of the status of force and opposition, of stability and variability, *within* performativity" ("Critically Queer" 18). She argues that the term queer has previously functioned as a linguistic practice, designed to bring shame to those associated with it, but it is also this linkage that associates the term with force in a contemporary setting: "'Queer' derives its force precisely through the repeated invocation by which it has become linked to accusation, pathologization, insult" (Butler, "Critically Queer" 18). This association of queer also means that the term has an ambiguous meaning in contemporary society. She states that if the term queer is considered a site of collective contestation, "it will have to remain that which is, in the present, never fully owned, but always and only redeployed, twisted, queered from a prior usage and in the direction of urgent and expanding political purposes" (Butler, "Critically Queer" 19). Queer therefore becomes a term connected with political power structures and flexes and reproduces through the interaction with a normative repetitive society. Butler explains that "[a]s expansive as the term 'queer' is meant to be, it is used in ways that enforce a set of overlapping divisions [...] The term will be revised, dispelled, rendered obsolete to the extent that it yields to the demands which resist the term precisely because of the exclusions by which it is mobilized" ("Critically Queer" 20). Queer is not a constant, but instead a term that must be revised in relation to the political, social, and cultural climate in which it functions.

The heterosexual imperative is a power structure embedded in society, and it clashes with the term queer, as queer counters the very meaning of heterosexuality. It is, however, not enough to expose the heterosexual imperative deeply embedded in society, to overturn or erase it. Butler states that "there is no guarantee that exposing the naturalized status of heterosexuality will lead to its subversion. Heterosexuality can augment its hegemony *through* its denaturalization, as when we see denaturalizing parodies which reidealize heterosexual norms *without* calling them into question" ("Critically Queer" 22). This correlates with the concept of power structures associated and upheld by the heterosexual imperative, as it suggests that heterosexuality is so deeply ingrained in political, social, and cultural practices that even exposing it might instead help solidify it further in society. To this, Butler argues that the "political deconstruction of 'queer' ought not to paralyze the use of such terms, but, ideally, to extend its range, to make us consider at what expense and for what purposes the terms are used, and through what relations of power such categories have been wrought" ("Critically Queer" 20). It is therefore essential to consider the political power structures associated with queer when analyzing and discussing the term in a contemporary societal context.

Stereotypes and representation

In his book *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representations* (2002) Richard Dyer presents his understanding of *stereotypes* and how they are created and maintained by the heteronormative imperative. He draws on Walter Lippmann, who is generally acknowledged as the first to formulate a definition of stereotyping and stereotypes (Dyer 11). In Lippmann's book *Public Opinion* (1922), he defines stereotypes as a tool to manage the ever-expansion of the world that people engage with and make sense of, and it was perceived as a helpful tool when understanding cultures and social groups outside of one's own (119). When Lippmann coined the phrase stereotypes, he did not understand it as a solely negative term but acknowledged that it was placed in a complex relationship between usefulness and harmfulness (Dyer 11). Useful in the sense that people need a method for processing informational overflow, as well as informational shortcuts and pre-established understandings, which he termed stereotypes, presented themselves as a tool that could guide people through the ever-expanding and ever-changing nature of society (Lippmann 119). Harmful when overdone, as it creates fertile ground for cultivating fixated and rigid representation, which will minimize people's understanding and appreciation of other cultures (Lippmann 119). Ultimately, harmful stereotypes "reduce people to a few, simple,

essential characteristics, which are represented as fixed by Nature" (Hall 257). This results in one fixed representation that seems unalterable and absolute, which could lead to groups having conflicted worldviews, where the subordinate group will feel marginalized and stigmatized, often not identifying themselves with this rigid description created by the dominant system value (Hall 259). Stereotyping is a tool for the dominant culture to fixate on and control social groups which pose a threat. Lastly, stereotypes induce a sense of understanding these groups for the dominant culture.

Dyer adopts Lippmann's four categories: An ordering process, a shortcut, referring to the world, and expressing our values and beliefs (Dyer 11). However, the category 'referring to the world' will not be employed, and will therefore not be defined, as it serves to interpret the implications of stereotypes in fiction, something outside of the scope of this dissertation. Furthermore, it should be noted that Dyer takes on a more sociological approach to stereotypes and stereotyping than Lippmann, which is pertinent as it investigates "how stereotypes function in social thought" (Dyer 11) and this will be relevant when investigating the process of stereotyping and the consequences of these oppressive representations.

The first category, 'an ordering process', refers to the way people employ stereotypes to understand the ever-changing society they find themselves in. People make sense of society through typification and generalizations and as a result, end up reproducing them (Dyer 12). According to Dyer, there are two problems with viewing stereotypes in this light. The first is the need for ordering "'the great blooming, buzzing confusion of reality is liable to be accompanied by a belief in the absoluteness and certainty of any particular order, a refusal to recognize its limitations and partiality, its relativity and changeability, and a corresponding incapacity to deal with the fact and experience of blooming and buzzing'" (Dyer 12). Stereotypes are located in a complex relationship between a need for ordering society to comprehend the mass amount of new information, and the risk of creating and maintaining fixated and harmful stereotypes about people outside of the range of definition-making e.g., the subordinate group. Secondly, this insinuates something about the power relations in society, as the power to define and control stereotypes is situated with the majority, rather than considering if the stereotypes might be restraining the subordinate groups subjected to the narrowness of these typifications (Dyer 12).

Secondly, 'a shortcut' refers "to the manner in which stereotypes are a very simple, striking, easily-grasped form of representation but are nonetheless capable of condensing a great deal of complex information and a host of connotations" (Dyer 12). The ability to refer a stereotype accurately at someone and to understand the implications that comes with it

exposes a complex social structure because, in doing so, both the person using the stereotype and the person understanding the stereotype must have compressed an enormous amount of information and come to the same conclusion. Namely, that they share the same ethnocentricity and use their place in the power structure to define "simple, vivid, memorable, easily grasped and widely recognized' characteristics about a person [and to] reduce everything about the person to those traits, exaggerate and simplify them, and fix them without change or development to eternity" (Hall 258).

Lastly, 'the expression of value' refers to the most problematic part of stereotyping, namely the use of 'our' and 'we', because one must ask oneself who 'we', 'our', and 'us' is. The power of stereotypes and stereotyping stems from their ability to infuse consensus - to create an imagined community from which groups can be excluded. Dyer explains that:

> Stereotypes proclaim, 'This is what everyone - you, me and us - thinks members of such-and-such a social group are like […] The stereotype is taken to express a general agreement about a social group, as if that agreement arose before, and independently of, the stereotype. Yet for the most part, it is from stereotypes that we get our ideas about social groups. (14)

This consensus is an expression of the power structure within society, as it is the people in the power positions who propose, define, naturalize, and uphold a stereotype - often about a group outside of the sphere of decision-making. As a result, they define who belongs to the 'we' and 'us' and in part who do not.

A way to detect if this consensus is real or imposed is by looking at how rigid and shrill a stereotype is - the stricter a definition, the less of a real consensus is present which, in turn, equals an enforced representation promoted by the dominant value system (Dyer 16). For the dominant group, the primary purpose of stereotypes is to make visible boundaries in an otherwise invisible process and to maintain these sharp boundaries within society to expose potential threats to the heteronormative (Dyer 16). The dominant value system must explain and stigmatize a subordinate group - even at the risk of creating upright wrong and restricting stereotypes in the effort to maintain their power position.

In relation to the expression of values, Dyer draws on Orrin E. Klapp's distinction between social types and stereotypes. This is a useful resource, as it makes a distinction between who belongs to society and who do not (Dyer 14). Social types are a representation of one's belonging, as they are the ones expected to be found in society, while stereotypes are the ones people are led to understand as not belonging (Dyer 14). This points towards the question of power structures again, as it makes clear that the people who do or do not belong

"to a given society as a whole is then a function of the relative power of groups in that society to define themselves as central and the rest as 'other', peripheral or outcast" (Dyer 14). A few reservations should however be made about such a sharp division, as the boundaries are far more complex in society than presented by Klapp. There will inevitably be overlaps between belonging to a social group and stereotypes e.g., a man belongs to a social group, but a queer man might not. If one moves beyond this simplification, it is evident that this notion of belongingness points to a prominent part of stereotyping - namely, that it makes the invisible boundaries visible (Dyer 16) and hence makes it possible to detect when someone oversteps and causes danger to the established power structure, even when the social category is far closer to the norm than the dominant type cares to admit.

Folk Devils and Moral Panics

In his book, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (2012) Stanley Cohen investigate the media's responsibility for the rise of *moral panic*. Now and then societies are subjected to moral panics when "a condition, person or group of persons emerges defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media" (Cohen 1) and it is thus of relevance, as moral panic enables simplified and often harmful representations. Cohen points to the fact that the mass media is the most important factor in creating moral panic as they are:

> (i) *Setting the agenda* - selecting those deviant or socially problematic events deemed as newsworthy, then using fine filters to select which of these events are candidates for moral panic; (ii) *Transmitting the images* - transmitting the claims of claims-makers, by sharpening up or dumbing down the rhetoric of moral panics; or (iii) *Breaking the silence, making the claim*. More frequently now than three decades ago, the media are in the claims-making business themselves. (xix)

This summarizes the role the media has in choosing which groups are demonized and in turn, which are not. The media holds an immense amount of power in creating and distributing deviances and it is the filter from which the public perceives a community. In contemporary society, information is never presented in its raw form to the public but has always been processed by the mass media beforehand (Cohen 9-10). This means that the interpretation process has already begun and alternative definitions of what constitutes news and in what manner it should be gathered and presented have been conducted. Furthermore, the information is also influenced by "the various commercial and political constraints in which newspapers, radio and television operate" (Cohen 9), and these contributors must also be

scrutinized, as they participate in the process of selecting and constructing a certain discourse in terms of communities outside of the heteronormative imperative.

The mass media shapes social deviances and has long "operated as agents of moral indignation in their own right: even if they are not self-consciously engaged in crusading or muck-raking, their very reporting of certain 'facts' can be sufficient to generate concern, anxiety, indignation or panic" (Cohen 9-10). This means that the media is conducting the selection process - they are choosing who is recognized as a threat to society and who gets to pass by unnoticed (Cohen 12-13). Thus, it is vital to investigate whether the media is biased in its creation of scapegoats, as it can be contributory to uncovering potential underlying power structures and political instigators afflicting harmful stereotypes of minority groups. The news "is the main source of information about the normative contours of society. It informs us about right and wrong, about the boundaries beyond which one should not venture, and about the shapes that the devil can assume" (Cohen 11). So, our need for news coverage is in binary opposition between useful and harmful. The news holds the power to inform us about shifts in society, but also to shape our shared understanding of the world - they can choose to either increase or decrease an escalation regarding moral panics.

Narratology

The premise of a memoir is the non-fictitious narrative representation of personal experiences. *Gender Queer* and *All Boys Aren't Blue* are both narratively center around lived experiences as a marginalized queer person in a predominantly heterosexualized society and are therefore both reflections of queer identity and gender in a contemporary context. When investigating identity in a literary context, it is relevant to explore the various narratological components, as it can help elucidate potential representations in a narrative and how the reader may perceive these.

In his book *Rhetorical Narratology* (1999), Michael Kearns proposes a new take on the field of narratology. He introduces a new area within the matrix of narratology and rhetoric, namely *rhetorical narratology*, which is a theoretical approach that encompasses "narratology's tools for analyzing texts and rhetoric's tools for analyzing the interplay between texts and contexts in order better to understand how audiences experience narratives" (2). The object of rhetorical narratology is to consider narratives from a perspective that comprises how narratives perform socially constituted actions - narratives as both 'saying' and 'doing' simultaneously (Kearns 2). Rhetorical narratology is founded on speech-act theory, which is contributory to describing, as well as explaining how the

interaction between reader and text unfolds (Kearns 2). The focus on speech acts contributes to the prominence of the interaction between reader and text, thereby treating narratives as a discourse rather than a genre, "identified by the functions it serves and the kinds of situations in which it occurs" (Kearns 2). Furthermore, rhetorical narratology is centered around context, as Kearns claims that "the right context can cause almost any text to be taken as a narrative and that there are no textual elements that guarantee such a reception" (2). It is therefore pertinent to include the perspective of the reader, as it contextualizes the presented narrative in a social and cultural setting. Within this contextualist framework, the main focuses in rhetorical narratology are *audience* and *voice* (Kearns 2). Kearns explains how these two roles are theoretically available within any narrative and that put together, "these sets of roles determine how an audience will take the narrative as being transmitted and where authority will lie within the interaction between audience and narrative" (Kearns 3).

The first central concept for rhetorical narratology, namely audience, relates to how an audience receives and interprets any given narrative. Kearns explains how "[every] narrative implies a rhetorical situation that is fundamental to all analysis: an audience listening to someone telling a story" (47). This also implies that without an audience, there would be no narrative, as there would be no recipient. When examining the concept of audience, the interactional trifecta of the sender, receiver, and message become central (Kearns 49). Kearns describes this as an intentional focus on "studying the roles a reader may adopt in responding, through time, to a narrating situation" (49). Because the reader cannot know the author's intention for a given narrative when reading a text, the reader must construct this intention themselves and this process therefore becomes subjective as the reader subjugates the narrative through a personal cultural scope (Kearns 50). For this project, the role of the audience will be applied to the media outlets discussing *Gender Queer* and *All Boys Aren't Blue*, where components from critical discourse analysis will help examine and discuss the media's role in the overall interpretation and presentation of both memoirs.

The other aspect of the contextualized framework for rhetorical narratology is voice. When investigating the concept of voice in a narrative context, the starting point will be to identify the narrating voices of the text (Kearns 107). In doing so, the following questions are contributory to the analysis of narrating voices, as they help decode the narrative choices and how these choices may impact the overall narrative arc: "[What] are the *levels* of the various *narrating acts*, and what are the *relationships* of the *narrating voices* to the stories they are narrating? [...] [What] other acts [do] these voices perform and how [do] those acts [...] move

readers aesthetically, ethically, emotionally, intellectually" (Kearns 107). The position of voice centers around the concepts of narrator and focalizer, as the two narrative devices in combination with one another constitute the voice situated inside of the narrative and are contributory to the overall perception and understanding of a given narrative (Kearns 99 - 113). In the analysis and discussion of the two memoirs, Kearns' concepts for narrative voice will be the primary approach for identifying narrative choices and how these choices impact the overall interpretation. The subcategories to Kearns' concept of voice will be unfolded when used in the analytical chapters.

Queer narratology

Because the two memoirs are queer narrative representations, narrative voice must be investigated through a queer scope, as it can help clarify how queer correlates with the narrative concept of voice and how these two components in combination with one another can construct queer representation. Whereas Kearns focuses on the overall concept of narrative voice, Susan Lanser investigates the specific area of *queer narrative voice* and how the verb 'to queer' might express queerness in a narrative context. In the article "Queering narrative voice" (2018), Susan Lanser investigates the use of queer voices in narrative theory, exploring "the specific subject of narrative voice and asks how it might be 'queered' by considering three distinct meanings of the verb 'to queer'" (923). According to Lanser, narrative theory lacks a focus on what she calls 'queer possibilities'; a focus that narrative theory itself calls for (923). In the article, she proposes a method for identifying and investigating narrative voice from a queer perspective, exploring how it might be queered through three distinct meanings of the verb 'to queer' (923).

Lanser suggests three ways for academia to utilize the term queer: "(1) to make a claim for the non-heteronormative sex, gender, or sexuality of someone or something; (2) to disrupt or deconstruct binary categories of sex, gender, and/or sexuality; and (3) to disrupt or deconstruct any entity by rejecting its categories, binaries, or norms" (924). Lanser's main goal for the article is to investigate different meanings of the verb 'to queer', as well as how these meanings function in relation to narrative voices (924). In doing so, Lanser draws a connection between the terms queer and voice, stating that voice might also be perceived as a queer term, as it is almost always used in a metaphoric sense without being recognized in this manner, much like the fluidity of queer (926). In a textual studies context, voice can refer to an expression of opinion, a collective of identities, or a synonym of style; all groupings that, as Lanser points out, can be put into context with queer, thereby creating what is commonly

called a queer voice (926). However, this does not define the structures of voice in a narrative context. Lanser suggests a framework for analyzing and discussing queer voice in a narrative setting, where queer voice can be one of the following three categories: "(1) a voice belonging to a textual speaker who can be identified as a queer subject by virtue of sex, gender, or sexuality; (2) a voice that is textually ambiguous or subverts the conventions of sex, gender, or sexuality; and (3) a voice that confounds the rules for voice itself and thus baffles our categorical assumptions about narrators and narrative" (926). As the two chosen memoirs are queer memoirs written by openly queer authors, only the first of Lanser's three categories will be applicable, as it refers to an openly queer narrative voice.

The first category of queer voice in Lanser's narrative analytical framework refers to a narrative voice that can be identified as a queer subject by virtue of sex, gender, or sexuality. If the assumption is that queer designates "an explicitly identified *narrating subject* speaking in the first person" (Lanser 927), the concept of queer voice in this context may also be an indicator for other markers for the subject such as race, class, ethnicity and these markers may range from none to in-depth cultural assumptions about narrators (Lanser 927). Lanser notes that queerness "is probably of all narrative voices the least likely to take an uncoded form" (927), stating that when thinking of queer voice in an identitarian sense, it is pertinent to differentiate between what Lanser calls 'out' and 'closeted' narrative voices, meaning "voices sexually self-named and voices open to contestation" (927). The openly queer narrator is, with a few exceptions, a recent phenomenon (Lanser 927), and this shift in openness begs the question of how openly queer narrators are characterized textually and narratively, as well as "whether they seem to be addressing queer or non-queer narratees, and how they construct authority and solicit empathy" (Lanser 928). These questions for queer narrators can be mapped out through an intersectional scope of gender, race, class, as well as other markers for identity that can impact the narrative possibilities (Lanser 928).

Critical discourse analysis

David Machin's and Andrea Mayr's notion of critical discourse analysis, presented in their book *How to Do Critical Discourse Analysis: A Multimodal Introduction* (2012), is an essential tool for examining and discussing the US media outlets' chosen representation of the two books and the allegations made against them. The methods presented in the three chapters "Presenting Speech and Speakers: Quoting Verbs", "Representing People: Language and Identity" and "Representing Action: Transitivity and Verb Processes" will be outlined, as

it is these concepts that allow for a thorough examination of the utilized discourse in the media coverage.

In the chapter "Presenting Speech and Speakers: Quoting Verbs" Machin and Mayr outline the importance of recognizing and analyzing the verbs chosen to represent a speaker, as it can have a "considerable impact on the way that authors can shape perceptions of events" (58) or about a person. The representation can vary from simply being a neutral representation to a representation that seeks to make an impression on the recipient - either way it is not overtly stated, but communicated through the connotative value of the chosen quoting verb. To conduct a thorough analysis of quoting verbs, Machin and Mayr have adopted five of Caldas Coulthard's categories: Neutral structuring verbs, metapropositional verbs, metalinguistic verbs, descriptive verbs, and transcript verbs. The five categories for quoting verbs will be further elaborated on when first introduced in the analysis. All the quoting verbs function to make participants appear in a certain way e.g., how the author wishes to make them appear - both positive and negative. For that reason, it is pertinent to investigate how they are portrayed through the chosen verbs, as it states something about the power structure in relation to controlling the narrative and who is taking part in creating and maintaining harmful stereotypes and positions on the outside of the normative. By analyzing the quoting verbs, it will become evident what role the media plays and the importance of their calculated choices.

In the chapter "Representing People: Language and Identity", Machin and Mayr present the possibilities available to the communicator when "deciding how they wish to represent individuals and groups of people" (77) - also known as representational strategies. This makes it possible for the author to highlight or omit certain aspects of the speaker by choosing where to position people in social group settings, as there exists "no neutral way to represent a person … all choices will serve to draw attention to certain aspects of identity that will be associated with certain kinds of discourses" (Machin and Mayr 77). Machin and Mayr present 10 different strategies for this purpose. These strategies are: Personalization and impersonalization, individualization versus collectivization, specification, and generalization, nomination or functionalization, use of honorifics, objectivation, anonymization, aggregation, pronoun versus noun: the 'us' and 'them' division, and lastly suppression. Each category will be further detailed when first introduced.

In their fifth chapter "Representing Action: Transitivity and Verb Process" Machin and Mayr introduce the process of representing people performing actions, the study of transitivity, and what words are chosen when represented as doing or not doing something.

Transitivity is "the study of what people are depicted as doing and refers, broadly, to who does what to whom and how" (Machin and Mayr 104). This allows for an analysis of who is presented as actively doing something and who is merely being affected by an action. Machin and Mayr use Halliday's notion 'the grammar of language' which, unlike the traditional grammatical approaches, is a "system of 'options' from which speakers and writers choose according to social circumstances, with transitivity playing a key role in 'meaning making' in language" (104). This means that the choices being made are always of significance and some of these choices might be founded on ideology. When analyzing agency and action three aspects of meaning are in focus. These three aspects are the participants, who are the people who are doing and being done to, the processes, meaning the action carried out, and the circumstances, referring to the time and manner of the event (Machin and Mayr 105). Machin and Mayr present six types of processes - material, mental, behavioral, verbal, relational, and existential and these processes will be further explained when first encountered in the examination of the news coverage.

Multimodal discourse analysis
In *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* (2006), Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen introduce a methodology that fixates on the multimodal aspect, herein visual components, of discourse. As the subtitle of their book suggests, Kress and van Leeuwen consider the visual semiotics of multimodal discourse analysis a grammar for analyzing and discussing visual representations from a discursive perspective. Visual grammar is "a social resource for a particular group, its explicit and implicit knowledge about this resource, and its uses in the practices of this group" (3), as well as a literal grammar for understanding all aspects of multimodal discourse components (Kress and van Leeuwen 3). It is not an entirely universal grammar but is instead culturally specific, and must therefore be understood through a cultural lens, as the universal aspect lies in semiotic principles and processes, whereas the cultural aspect lies in the application of these through the course of history (Kress and van Leeuwen 4). Images can be a vital participatory factor in relaying implied discourses and ideologies, and critical discourse analysis can be helpful to uncover these components of images. Kress and van Leeuwen explain how "[visual] structures do not simply reproduce the structures of 'reality'. On the contrary, they produce images of reality which are bound up with the interests of the social institutions within which the images are produced, circulated, and read. They are ideological. Visual structures are never merely formal: they have a deeply important semantic dimension" (47). For analyzing and discussing

multimodal texts, they present three areas: Representational meaning, interactive meaning, and compositional meaning.

Representational meaning is the first category, and within this category, there are two subcategories, which in combination make up representational meaning. The two subcategories are narrative representation and conceptual representation. Kress and van Leeuwen explain the difference between the two categories as follows: "[Conceptual] patterns represent participants in terms of their class, structure or meaning, in other words, in terms of their generalized and more or less stable and timeless essence [and] narrative patterns serve to present unfolding actions and events, processes of change, transitory spatial arrangements" (59). The first subcategory, narrative representations, describes a vectorial pattern, where a vector is always present in the image and the participants are therefore portrayed doing something to or for each other (Kress and van Leeuwen 59). In narrative representations, there is always a vector present, as opposed to conceptual structures, where vectors are never present (Kress and van Leeuwen 59). Conceptual representation is another component of representational meaning. Where narrative representations convey a dynamic process, conceptual representation is the representation of something static (Kress and van Leeuwen 79). Within conceptual representations, there are three major processes: The classificational process, the analytical process, and the symbolic process (Kress and van Leeuwen 79). In relation to the two queer memoirs, only the category of symbolic processes is relevant, and this category will be further elaborated on when first used in the analysis.

Interactive meaning relates to "the interaction between the producer and the viewer of the image" and is a visual resource for constituting and maintaining interaction between the depicted components of a visual presentation (Kress and van Leeuwen 114). Within interactive meaning, there are two kinds of participants, "*represented participants* (the people, the places and things depicted in images) and *interactive participants* (the people who communicate with each other *through* images, the producers and viewers of images)" (Kress and van Leeuwen 114). There are furthermore three kinds of relations: "(1) relations between represented participants; (2) relations between interactive and represented participants (the interactive participants' attitudes towards the represented participants); and (3) relations between interactive participants (the things interactive participants do to or for each other through images)" (Kress and van Leeuwen 114). Important to note is that interactive participants are real people who produce and interpret images in a cultural and social context, but the producer and the viewer may never interact outside of the image (Kress and van Leeuwen 114). Moreover, interactive meaning encompasses a system of three components,

which in combination make a whole for the analysis and discussion of interactive meaning in relation to multimodal discourse: Contact, social distance, and attitude. These will be elaborated on when used in the analysis of the two memoirs.

Kress and van Leeuwen's third category for analyzing and discussing multimodal discourse is compositional meaning, and this category focuses on the intersection of the representational and interactive elements of a given visual narrative and how these two components constitute a meaningful whole (176). When examining and analyzing a visual, "the placement of the elements [...] endows them with specific information values relative to each other" (Kress and van Leeuwen 176) and it is thus important to discuss the placement of the elements, as the composition deliberately conveys a certain ideology or meaning (Kress and van Leeuwen 176). Within compositional meaning, there are three subcategories: Information value, salience, and framing. These three components constitute an interrelated system that relates the interactive and the representational meanings of the image to one another, and they do not only apply to single images, but also "composite visuals, visuals which combine text and image and, perhaps, other graphic elements" (Kress and van Leeuwen 177). Again, these subcategories will be further explained when first used in the analysis.

Analysis and discussion

We have chosen to construct an overall section for the analysis and discussion, wherein we will include four subchapters that in combination encompass several aspects of the book banning debate. The four subchapters are as follows. The first chapter, "All eyes on me: A critical investigation into the media representation of banned books", will contain a critical discourse analysis of four articles from four different US media outlets. Chapter two and three, "Gender Queer" and "All Boys Aren't Blue", are analytical chapters about the two chosen memoirs. Chapter four titled "The Conservative-Christians versus the queer temporality: A discussion about the evolution of American society, culture and values" is a discussion about the different components at play regarding the book banning surge.

To create an analysis that focuses on the critique associated with *Gender Queer* and *All Boys Aren't Blue*, we have chosen to first conduct a critical discourse analysis of selected media outlets to examine the representation of the two memoirs. This sharpens the focus of the following narratological and multimodal discourse analysis of the two memoirs, as it will be structured around the findings of the media analysis. The focus on both aspects of the analysis - media and books - will be representation and self-representation, where the primary

aim is to investigate whether there is any inconsistency between the representation of the books in the media and the representation within the books. Lastly, we will broaden the perspective from the two selected books and the chosen articles to a general discussion about the elements constructing and impacting the book banning movement currently happenings in the US; what elements are impacting the movement, how has it developed throughout the years, why these books at this time and conclusively investigate the book banning movement through the lens of queer temporality. By including this discussion, we are able to expand the scope from a focused analysis of selected media outlets and two memoirs to a comprehensive debate about societal, cultural and political aspects impacting the current surge in challenged and banned queer young adult literature.

All eyes on me: A critical investigation into the media representation of banned books. Both *Gender Queer* and *All Boys Aren't Blue* are heavily discussed in various US news outlets. For this dissertation, four articles will be investigated through the methodical scope of critical discourse analysis and the chosen articles are from the *New York Post*, *CNN, TIME, and Chicago Tribune*. These four newspapers have been selected, as they together make out a dataset that represents both the political left- and right-wing, thus enabling the possibility to investigate if their political stance is influential on their representation. The four articles are positioned as such: The *New York Post* towards the right ("Media Bias/Fact Check NYP"), the *Chicago Tribune* towards the right-center ("Media Bias/Fact Check CT"), the *TIME* towards the left-centered ("Media Bias/Fact Check Time") and lastly *CNN* towards the left-oriented ("Media Bias/Fact Check CNN"). The *TIME* article and the *Chicago Tribune* article cover both *Gender Queer* and *All Boys Aren't Blue*, while the *New York Post* article only mentions *Gender Queer* and *CNN* focuses on *All Boys Aren't Blue*.

The four articles cover a time period of four months from November 2021 to March 2022. The news coverage of these two specific banned books began in November 2021 and continues beyond the time of this research. The *TIME* article is the first one to be published on November 15, 2021, then follows the *CNN* article on November 18, 2021. On January 31, 2022, the *Chicago Tribune* published their article and lastly the *New York Post* published their article on March 2, 2022. The four articles represent the development of the media coverage before and during this dissertation, thus taking the progression in the movement into consideration. These articles are representative of the general media coverage of the two books and will function as the insight into the discourse operationalized by the media outlets

and if and how this is shaping, conveying, and maintaining stereotypes about individuals identifying as queer.

New York Post

The *New York Post* article "Banned books in schools spark growing activism across the US" (Associated Press) offers the perspective of three types involved in the debate. Parents of children attending schools where books are being challenged and banned, organizations that initiate the ban of books, and organizations and institutions working for the freedom of speech, writing, and reading.

The quoting verbs utilized by the *New York Post* are presented in the table below, as it offers a readable overview. The verbs distribute as such:

Quoting verbs	*New York Post*
Neutral Structuring verbs	say (7), calls (3), response, telling, speaking up, stating
Metapropositional verbs	realize, announce, describe, declaring, acknowledge
Descriptive verbs	begging

In the article, 20 quoting verbs are employed, whereas half of these are repetitions of the same two verbs - say and call. The largest group is the neutral structuring verbs, which consist of 14 verbs. Neutral structuring verbs present a saying without evaluation explicitly attached to it (Machin and Mayr 59). These verbs do not carry guidance as to how the reader should interpret the statement or the speaker. By utilizing neutral structuring verbs, the author does not present any underlying commentary on how they wish the reader to interpret the speaker, their statement, thoughts, feelings, and mental state. If a speaker is represented solely through neutral structuring verbs it can "appear as disengaged or even less personalised" (Machin and Mayr 59), but it can also indicate a certain level of authority and professionalism - leaving the space for judgment up to the reader.

The second largest group is the metapropositional verbs containing five of the instances. Metapropositional verbs "mark the author's interpretation of a speaker" (Machin and Mayr 60) and here the reader is presented with an interpretation of the speaker or utterance and how the reader should interpret the speaker. The metapropositional verbs can

be further subdivided into three categories: assertive, directive, and expressive. Assertive metapropositional verbs denote confidence and certainty when people make utterances using verbs such as 'remark', 'explain' and 'announce'. Directive metapropositional verbs denote authority and are often used by state officials when making public announcements. Directive verbs include verbs such as 'urge', 'instruct', and 'order'. Lastly, expressive metapropositional verbs function to describe a speaker as driven by emotions. This is achieved through verbs such as 'accuse', 'swear', and 'confess' (Machin and Mayr 59-60).

The amount of neutral structuring verbs suggests that the article is adopting a neutral or a non-overtly representation strategy when presenting the speakers in the article - this is the instance for both sides of the book banning movement. An example of this is the representation of Yael Levin, who is a spokeswoman for No Left Turn in Education:

> 'There are some books with pornography and pedophilia [referring to *Gender Queer*] that should absolutely be removed for K through 12 school libraries,' says Yael Levin, a spokeswoman for No Left Turn in Education, a national group opposed to what it calls a 'Leftist agenda' for public schools that has called on Attorney General Merrick Garland to investigate the availability of 'Gender Queer' among other books. 'Now we're not talking about a public library or bookstores. We're talking about K through 12 school libraries, books that are just pornographic and with pedophilic content'. (Associated Press)

In this case, Levin is cited by the neutral structuring verbs 'say' and 'call'. This brings no immediate guidance as to how the reader should interpret Levin or her statement, but it also leaves a distance between the reader and Levin. Additionally, it also makes Levin appear confident and calm when outlining her motive for banning the books. It is up to the reader to make their judgment of Levin and her statement - thus deciding for themselves whether they agree. Levin's motive for banning books such as *Gender Queer* is founded in a stereotype that queer people are flaunting their sexuality and that they deliberately and provocatively choose to portray sex and sexuality in a manner that differs from the heteronormative imperative (Anderson 194).

According to Kristin J. Anderson, this can be "distilled to one issue: openness about one's [sexual] orientation is equivalent to 'flaunting it'. The belief that [queer people] advertise their sexuality is rooted in common errors in thinking and supported by a culture that tolerates and promotes homophobia and heterosexism" (194). This stereotype is partly rooted in the media's narrow coverage of the queer community by, for instance, only displaying the drag queens with spectacular outfits or gay people in speedos and glitter, rather

than the queer family attending the same parade with a stroller and diaper bag (Anderson 199). Anderson elaborates on this note, stating that "once we have information that a person is [queer] that single characteristic assumes great significance and, we tend to see the person through a lens of stereotypes perpetuated by our culture" (199-200). This is also referred to as illusory correlation, which is an "overestimation of the strength of a relationship between two variables. The variables in question may not be related at all, or the relationship could be weaker than assumed" (Anderson 194). Illusory correlation links two elements even if the connection is scarce or non-existent. The belief that queer people flaunt their sexuality is "rooted in some heterosexuals' belief that the difference between homosexuality and heterosexuality can be reduced to the act of sex" (Anderson 212). So, it could be argued that Levin's one-sided focus on the sexual content of *Gender Queer* is founded on the heterosexual obsession with queer people's sexuality, rather than Kobabe 'flaunting' it.

When the author of the *New York Post* article chooses to pass on Levin's message, through a quote, they choose to distribute this stereotype to the public. By doing this and not guiding the reader's interpretation of the statement, they are taking part in maintaining and forwarding a harmful perception of the queer community - it is this absence of distancing and by passing on the stereotype that is harmful as "people better remember information that confirms their stereotypes than information that disconfirms their stereotypes" (Anderson 197).

Aside from the quoting verbs, this example also contains multiple representational strategies. Throughout the *New York Post* article, the author has used six strategies, and these have been employed 30 times. When analyzing the article for its use of the strategies, patterns emerge. The first noticeable pattern is the extent to which the strategy 'nomination and functionalization' and the 'use of honorifics' have been used. 'Nomination and functionalization' is the representation of speakers in terms of who they are or what they do (Machin and Mayr 81). Nomination means to represent people as who they are, while functionalization depicts people in terms of what they do. This can have different effects as the "use of functionalisation can sound more official, whereas nomination can sound more personal" (Machin and Mayr 81). The use of honorifics refers to the act of referring to a person who holds a prominent position by this function - this signals "the importance of a social actor or specialisation" (Machin and Mayr 82) and it can elevate the importance of the said statement or person speaking.

The strategies are consistently being used throughout the article and constitute 17 out of the 30 cases. They have been employed in such a manner that the people, who are working

for organizations or institutions, are solely functionalized, while parents engaged in school boards or who have created organizations dealing with the book banning are represented both as a person and their function. Furthermore, the author utilizes their honorific status and functionalization to represent Yael Levin solely through her function as a spokeswoman for the No Left Turn In Education. The author uses this strategy to underpin Levin's statement with the reliability associated with her title. This is another example of the author siding with the part who are believing, maintaining, and spreading the stereotype.

Organizations, institutions, and people who work to stop book banning are represented like Yael Levin and the No Left Turn in Education:

> The American Civil Liberties Union, PEN America and the NCAC have been working with local activists, educators and families around the country, helping them 'to prepare for meetings, to draft letters and to mobilize opposition,' according to PEN America's executive director, Suzanne Nossel. The CEO of Penguin Random House, Markus Dohle, has said he will personally donate $500,000 for a book defense fund to be run in partnership with PEN. Hachette Book Group has announced 'emergency donations' to PEN, the NCAC and the Authors Guild. (Associated Press)

In this example, the author uses honorifics and functionalization in seven different cases. All these functions to give the impression of legitimacy and heighten the credibility of the statement made by Suzanne Nossel. It also functions to signify to the reader that all these organizations and institutions are taking matters seriously and the reader should therefore find comfort in the signaling effect of their official-sounding titles. As the author has chosen to represent a substantial proportion of organizations and only a few individuals, it emphasizes the importance of those individuals. Individualization can be used to humanize participants, bringing them closer to the reader, while collectivization can distance the participants from the reader (Machin and Mayr 80). Adding an individual amongst the organizations makes Nossel stand out and her message thus becomes more significant in the eyes of the reader - she becomes the representative of the organizations working against the banning thus putting more weight on her statement. Moreover, as they stand in opposition to Yael Levin and the No Left Turn in Education, they are indirectly positioned against the queer stereotype that Levin represents – thus, the author makes use of indirect strategy to influence the reader's understanding of the severity of the sexual content in *Gender Queer*, as the majority of the represented speakers in the article do not agree with Levin's viewpoint.

In addition to the specified organizations and institutions, there are also examples of generic groups - the 'local activists, educators, and families' who, on paper, share some of the

same classifications as the other groups, but who are included to add a local community amongst the national organizations. By including this perspective, the author situates the debate in something the reader can recognize from their community and brings it into a more personal sphere. So, the range of outrage goes from the local community up to national organizations and by illustrating this the author seeks to influence the reader through this manifold and broad representation

The last example from this article displays the way the author has chosen to represent parents of children attending schools where this is occurring:

'By winter break, we realized this was happening all over the state and needed to start a project to rally parents to protect access to information and ideas in school,' says Ferrell, a mother of two. Along with fellow Orange County parent Jen Cousins, she founded the Florida Freedom to Read Project which works with existing parent groups statewide on a range of educational issues, including efforts to 'keep or get back books that have gone under challenge or have been banned'. (Associated Press)

Unlike the other two examples, Stephana Ferrell is represented by the author in a manner where the focus is placed on her personal investment in the initiatives. This is achieved by personalizing, individualizing, and nominating her through the mentioning of her role as a mother of two. The reader is influenced to interpret this as her motivation for founding the project. According to Machin and Mayr, the strategy of personalization or impersonalization is when a person is presented as a private person, and sometimes there might be a disclosure of personal information, which can result in the reader feeling sympathy for the speaker (79). The use of personal information is only used in two instances throughout the article, and both are when representing mothers of children. The other one is Paris, "the mother of 7- and 3-year old boys" (Associated Press). This additional information functions to create empathy and to align the reader alongside Paris's and Ferrell's standpoint. In this case, the author chooses to adopt strategies that concentrate on the personal aspect of the two women and focus on their personal investment in the cause. They are represented as rational yet emotionally invested, which does not conflict with their interest, but rather functions to showcase their motivation and thus heighten their likeability with the reader.

A general feature of the article is the use of verb processes. The author uses two verb processes - the material and the mental. The material process accounts for the process of asking "whether participants are represented as actors, goals, or as beneficiaries of processes" (Machin and Mayr 106-107). The mental process can be divided into three categories: Cognition, affection, and perception. Cognition includes verbs such as thinking, knowing,

and understanding, affection contains verbs such as liking and fearing, while perception holds verbs such as seeing, hearing, and perceiving. The mental process functions to give the reader an internal view of the participants (Machin and Mayr 107).

The material process is by far the most predominant process used in the article accounting for 54 of the 56 cases. These are verbs such as but not limited to 'growing', 'remove', 'opposed', 'investigate', 'response', 'helping' 'rally', 'protect', and 'fighting'. What is noteworthy is that the material processes verbs are equally distributed amongst both sides of the movement - they are all portrayed as actively seeking out measures to help with their cause and its influence is equally distributed. However, by including Yael Levin and her unedited utterances for the banning of books grounded in the belief that *Gender Queer* is inherently pornographic, it is damaging as it sustains and conveys a harmful stereotype about the queer community. The strategies employed by the author to represent Yael Levin and her statements are impartial, thus representing these harmful stereotypes about the queer community as neutral to the reader. This adds to the escalation of the moral panic surrounding the book, as the *New York Post* does not position itself directly in opposition to the movement of erasing young adult queer literature from public schools and libraries nationwide. Even though the *New York Post* is positioned as a Right-Wing media outlet, its portrayal of the ongoing movement for challenging and banning queer young adult literature is not predominantly Right-Winged. Instead, they convey both sides evenly through neutral strategies, and by including a majority of sources who represent the group fighting against the ban of books, it neutralizes the inclusion of the harmful stereotypes about the queer community conveyed by Yael Levin. This does not align with the *New York Post*'s political standpoint, as the right-wing is in favor of the complete removal of certain queer literature.

CNN

The employed quoting verbs in the CNN article "A Florida school board member filed a criminal complaint over a Black queer memoir" (Chavez) are presented below.

Quoting verbs	*CNN*
Neutral structuring verbs	say (15), told (2), ask
Metapropositional verbs	believe (2), advocating, warns, details, encourage, describe, claiming, declined,

	reached out, wants, allowing, speak on behalf, warns, call on
Transcript verbs	added

Three categories are utilized in the *CNN* article, namely neutral structuring verbs, metapropositional verbs, and transcript verbs. In total, 34 quoting verbs appear where 19 derive from the neutral structuring verbs and 15 come from the metapropositional category, and one transcript verb. The *CNN* article does, however, contain more quoting verbs, namely more metapropositional verbs, compared to the *New York Post* article. This overview illustrates that the author of this article has more actively sought to influence the reader by using quoting verbs (Machin and Mayr 60). Three perspectives are offered in the article. The ones who instigate the ban on books, the ones who fight against the banning, and George M. Johnson, the author of *All Boys Aren't Blue*.

Jill Woolbright, a school board member who is pro-ban, is introduced in the heading, as well as in the first and second fields of the article. In the heading and the first field she is introduced as 'a school board member' (Chavez), while in the second field she is presented with additional information:

> Jill Woolbright, a member of the Flagler County School Board, filed a report with the county's sheriff's office last week claiming that having the book 'All Boys Aren't Blue' by author George M. Johnson in the district's libraries is a crime, according to a copy of the sheriff's office report obtained by CNN. Woolbright believes whoever is responsible for allowing the books into the Flagler County Schools district 'should be held accountable,' the sheriff's office report said. (Chavez)

Here, two metapropositional verbs 'claiming' and 'believes' have been used by the author to describe Woolbright's statements - thus controlling the reader's interpretation of Woolbright. Both verbs seek to diminish her credibility by presenting her through verbs that make her appear as emotional and irrational, rather than simply using neutral structuring verbs such as 'saying' or 'telling'. 'Claim' is an expressive verb and "claims are not factual but can be contested and the use of this word invites doubt" (Machin and Mayr 61) and the same goes for 'believing'. So, the verb choice paints Woolbright in a doubtful and unreliable light. In addition to the quoting verbs, the author has chosen to emphasize Woolbright's function as a member of the Flagler County School Board, and this is achieved by repeating it three times.

The functionalization of Woolbright steers attention towards her function rather than her personally - this makes her seem distanced, yet authoritative to the reader.

Alongside Woolbright and her statement, Governor Gregg Abbott is introduced: "In Texas, Gov. Gregg Abbott has called on the state's school boards to remove books he described as 'pornography' after at least two state lawmakers asked officials to investigate books in schools" (Chavez). Like Woolbright, the author has chosen to utilize the metapropositional verb 'describe' in connection to Abbott's single-word citation. This is done to underpin the fact that it is a subjective conclusion that Abbott himself has come to. This infuses a sense of personal opinion, thus diminishing Abbott's otherwise credible appearance from his honorific status as Governor. The author creates a connection between Woolbright's complaint and Abbott's statement, as these two represent the same opinion - they are working together in the effort to get *All Boys Aren't Blue* banned and, as a result, they together represent the stereotype of queer being inherently hypersexual, as it is their core argument for banning the book.

A different perspective brought forward in the article is the students attending the schools where books are being banned. Jack Petocz is a student at Flagler Palm Coast High School:

> 'I knew that I had to take action because I'm not going to allow censorship to occur within my school district, and I'm going to fight as hard as I can with other students,' said Jack Petocz, a 17-year-old student at Flagler Palm Coast High School. Petocz, who organized the protest, said many students believe Johnson's book and other books that address gender identity should be available at the libraries for students who may not feel seen, don't have supportive family members or need someone to identify with. (Chavez)

In contrast to Woolbright and Abbott, Petocz is represented through one neutral structuring verb 'say'. This choice, in itself, leaves the reader with no particular guidance as to how to interpret Petocz, but when compared to the representation of Woolbright and Abbott, it makes Petocz appear both calm and rational. Through this contrast, the author seeks to align the reader alongside Petocz and his standpoint. It is further enhanced by utilizing representational strategies that bring Petocz closer to the reader. This is done by offering personal information such as his age, where he attends high school, and his role as an organizer of the protest. Lastly, material verb processes such as 'take action' and 'fight' have been employed, as these verbs are associated with movement and function to make Petocz appear as actively doing a difference.

The last perspective brought forward by the *CNN* article is George M. Johnson's: 'I'm actually shocked it took this long for them to figure out that this book existed,' Johnson told CNN. 'I've always been prepared for the moment that it was going to be attacked and banned because in America people have an issue with books that tell the truth and my book tells the truth.' Johnson said they encourage people to read their entire book before making a judgment and warns about considering certain topics as 'too heavy' for teens and children. (Chavez)

As with Petocz, the author has chosen to employ neutral structuring verbs in relation to Johnson - namely, the verbs 'told' and 'said'. The author does not seek to have a direct influence on the reader's perception of Johnson, and this should again be seen in comparison with the representation of Woolbright and Abbott. By utilizing neutral structuring verbs, Johnson appears calm and collected when accounting for their viewpoint. In addition to the neutral structuring verbs, one metapropositional verb 'warn' has been used. Compared to the use of metapropositional verbs with Abbott and Woolbright, the author here employs the verb to underline positive aspects of Johnson's being, portraying them as worried for children and teenagers' accessibility to literature. Lastly, material verb processes such as 'encourage', 'making', and 'considering' is adopted by the author to make Johnson actively seek out measurements for making a difference for the right to expose children and teenagers to all kinds of literature. Thus, the author depicts Johnson as the symbol for the protection of the freedom to read and write diverse literature from an early age in public spaces in the US.

In conclusion, *CNN* seeks to be an influential part through its utilized representational strategies in the debate regarding the challenging and banning of books. They aim to assist the movement against the banning of books through a neutral portrayal of influential people such as Petocz and Johnson and this stands in direct opposition to the chosen representation of the pro-banning movement, where negatively charged representational strategies are employed instead. The discrepancy in the representation of each group highlights the fact that the author seeks to align the reader against people who initiates the book bans. This is achieved by adopting an influential representational strategy, wherein Abbott and Woolbright are represented as unreliable and emotionally motivated, thereby contrasting the representation of Johnson and Petocz. In contrast to the *New York Post*, *CNN* positions itself alongside its political viewpoint, as they are a left-orientated organization. This political standpoint aligns with their presentation of the movement that is working against the banning of books, as the anti-banning movement is predominantly left-winged and this correlates with

the political views that *CNN* presents in their article about compromised young adult queer literature.

<u>TIME</u>
The *TIME* article "'We're Preparing For a Long Battle.' Librarians Grapple With Conservatives' Latest Efforts to Ban Books" (Waxman) contains 30 quoting verbs. These are distributed as such:

Quoting verbs	TIME
Neutral structuring verbs	report (2), say (10), respond, told (2), covered, wrote
Metapropositional verbs	ordered, raised concerns, alarming, proposed, discuss, put it, called for (4), called it, called on, points out

There are only two categories at play in the article. The first is the neutral structuring verbs which account for 17 instances, while the remaining 13 comes from the metapropositional group. This positions the *TIME* article in between the *New York Post* article and the *CNN* article in terms of the amount of quoting verbs utilized, leaning slightly more towards the *CNN* article in terms of both quantity and usage.

The people represented in the *TIME* article can be divided into two groups. The people enforcing the ban of books, and the people working against the ban of books. In the representation of these two groups, one thing becomes particularly noticeable, namely that the people initiating the book bans are represented through a wide range of representational strategies such as individualization, specification, personalization, nomination, and functionalization at the same time, and lastly through their honorific status. An example of this is the representation of two parents from the Spotsylvania County Public School Board:

> Two board members, Courtland representative Rabih Abuismail and Livingston representative Kirk Twigg, said they would like to see the removed books burned. 'I think we should throw those books in a fire,' Abuismail said, and Twigg said he wants to 'see the books before we burn them so we can identify within our community that we are eradicating this bad stuff' (Waxman).

Here, the neutral structuring verb 'say' have been used twice. This is used about both Abuismail and Twigg. So, the author introduces their controversial statements without evaluating them explicitly, simply passing on their message without questioning their arguments. In addition to this, Abuismail and Twigg are thoroughly introduced to the reader through the mentioning of their full name and their honorific status as representatives of the school board - their statements should therefore be perceived as the collective opinion across the entire school board and its members. These strategies, combined with the neutral representation, seek to align the reader alongside Abuismail and Twigg and their statements. The use of additional information heightens their status as important voices in the debate, as it points to their status as board members. The combination of neutral structuring verbs and the representational strategies influences the reader's perception of Abuismail and Twigg, thus infusing them with a sense of reliability, where their motives and actions are justified by their honorific status.

In addition to Abuismail and Twigg, the author has also included several other people who agree with their standpoint and who are also working for the pro-banning movement:

> A campaign ad for recently-elected Virginia Governor Glenn Youngkin featured a mom who wanted *Beloved* banned from her son's high school. And on Nov. 10, both the governors of South Carolina and Texas called for investigations into books. In Texas, where there's a law designed to ban the teaching of critical race theory, Republican Governor Greg Abbott called on the Texas Education Agency to 'investigate any criminal activity in our public schools involving the availability of pornography,' while Republican South Carolina Governor Henry McMaster singled out *Gender Queer* per a tip from 'concerned parents' and called for a statewide investigation 'to prevent pornography and other obscene content from entering our State's public schools'. (Waxman)

In this, Virginia Governor Gleen Youngkin, Texas Governor Greg Abbott, and South Carolina Governor Henry McMaster, three men, who are all placed in the same powerful position, are represented in the same personalized, individualized, specified, and honorific manner as Abuismail and Twigg. The inclusion of these men, their political status and more importantly their unedited statements further strengthens the pro-banning movement and transmits their harmful conclusions of these books merely being 'pornography' and nothing more. This is done in multiple ways, the first being the inclusion of multiple sources, both people who have a personal investment (Abuismail and Twigg) and people who have a political motive (the Governors) - indicating that there is a shared opinion across numerous

populations groups, thereby demonstrating that this opinion is shared by the majority. Secondly, by dedicating a significant amount of space in the article to the quotes from these men without addressing if these books solely contain sexual content, the author indirectly validates these opinions.

Two similar metapropositional verbs are utilized in the example, the first is 'called for' which is used twice, and the second is 'called on'. It is only the prepositional that differs in the usage and the intended function of these verbs are the same. They function to make the Governors appear as demanding change and holding institutions, related to the banning of books, accountable in terms of investigating the books singled out. They are portrayed as powerful as well as protectors of the children and teenagers. In addition to this, material verb processes have been utilized to further underpin them making a difference and seeking out measurements concerning the book bans. As a result, the governors represent the state authority, which is a synonym for trust and protection, and this is infused into the reader's interpretation of them and their statements. The author aligns the reader alongside the movement initiating the book ban. Including the three governors who describe *Gender Queer* as pornography is a declaration of what Anderson defines as "heterosexual privilege" (222), which implicates "that heterosexuals are normal, that their romance and sexual behavior is normal and natural" (Anderson 222). The article forwards this stereotype of queer being inherently hypersexual, rather than questioning the heteronormative motivation behind this labeling of deviance.

In addition to the Governors, the author has chosen to include multiple anonymized yet recognizable and relatable people such as a 'mom', 'son', 'concerned parents', and 'public schools'. Whereas the governors are hard to relate to, as it is a selected few who have held or ever will hold that position in society, the anonymized people represent figures in the readers' local community who the reader, most likely, will have encountered throughout their lives. By anonymizing them, it invites the reader to fill out the blanks with their own set of faces and experiences and thus making it even more personal to the reader.

The six individuals representing the pro-banning movement are personalized. When compared to the movement working against the banning of books only four people are included. People or groups who work against the banning are more frequently introduced in an impersonal, collected, generic and nominating manner, meaning that their credibility is diminished by their appearance, as it is difficult for the reader to figure out who the representatives are:

While the school board is revisiting the decision after its attorney called it unconstitutional, the comments—and the fact that members tried to do such a review to begin with—are an extreme example of a trend that's alarming librarians and free speech activists. (Abuismail and Twigg did not immediately respond to a request for comment from TIME.) Only a few months into the school year, librarians say efforts to ban books are on the rise and mark a new chapter in the history of attempts to censor books. (Waxman)

In comparison with the representation of the pro-banning movement, here the representation is comparable in terms of the usage of quoting verbs. For example, the metapropositional verb 'called it' is also utilized here, but by solely referring to the attorney through their function, it does not carry the same weight as with the Governors who were personalized in their representation. Another example of a metapropositional verb used is 'alarming', which is utilized with 'librarians and free speech activists' - a group aggregated meaning "that participants are quantified and treated as 'statistics'" (Machin and Mayr 83). The author seeks to make the librarians appear as rightfully concerned emphasizing this by aggregating the amount to an unknown number of librarians. This can give the impression of "objective research and scientific credibility, when in fact we are not given specific figures" (Machin and Mayr 84), so this could benefit the movement against the ban of books. When considered in relation to the other utilized representational strategies, it results in a group who is even further distanced from the reader and thus becomes less identifiable, which does not positively influence the reader's perception as with the people banning the books.

The four personalized individuals representing the anti-banning movement are Deborah Caldwell-Stone Executive Director of the American Library Association's Office for Intellectual Freedom, Emily Knox, author of *Book Banning in 21st-Century America*, Chris Finan, Executive Director of the National Coalition Against Censorship, and Lisa Varga, Executive Director of the Virginia Library Association. Each of them is presented individually, whereas the Governors are represented as a unit, as well as the board members Abuismail and Twigg. An example of the representation of the anti-banning movement is in the final paragraph of the article:

But as Lisa Varga, Executive Director of the Virginia Library Association, points out, social media and the Internet make it near impossible to keep anything from students. 'The majority of these kids have cell phones with unfettered access to the Internet, she says. "They can find more on their phone—that you know their guardians provide and

> pay for—that's objectionable than they're going to find in the books in their school
> library'. (Waxman)

Here, Lisa Varga is both nominated and functionalized, where her role as Executive Director ascribes her and her statement with authority, respect, and reliability stemming from her position. The utilized quoting verbs 'points out' and 'say' function to make her appear level-headed in her arguments and thus heightens her credibility and in combination with the material verb processes 'keep' and 'make' portrays her as in motion - actively carrying out actions in her work against the banning of books.

The author has chosen to single out the people from the anti-banning movement. Even though the author seemingly offers the same strategies for the individual speakers, the choice of unifying one side and singling out the others makes them, and their arguments appear weaker in comparison to the unified groups, which seems to include a larger and more recognizable proportion of people. As a result, the author chooses strategies that negatively influence the reader's perception in terms of their interpretation of the group working in favor of the books.

To summarize, the author of the *TIME* article has utilized a variety of representational strategies which all collectively makes the pro-banning movement appear larger in amount, unified and reasonable in their arguments. The article portrays the pro-banning movement positively through representational strategies that influence the reader to perceive the pro-banning movement as reliably and authoritatively, thus justifying their motive for the complete removal of young adult queer literature. This motive is founded on the stereotypical perception of the queer community as being inherently hypersexual. The author predominantly employs the same strategies for the anti-banning movement and the overall representation of this group thus making them appear fragmented, even though they are presented in a neutral manner and their arguments as logical and unaltered. The imbalance becomes apparent in the number of people who are portrayed in great detail and the ones who are superficially presented or even anonymized. It is through this imbalance that the *TIME* article seeks to influence the reader's alignment thus favoring the pro-banning movement. Lastly, there is a discrepancy between *TIME's* political standpoint and the overall influence of the article, as *TIME* is recognized as left-centered. This does not correlate with the support for the pro-banning movement, which is founded on Right-Winged political convictions.

Chicago Tribune

The *Chicago Tribune* article "Book ban efforts are nothing in US schools, but experts call recent political tactics 'startling'" (Alter and Harris), exceeds the other three articles in the amount of quoting verbs, as they have used 49 quoting verbs and in the number of categories employed by including four different types of quoting verbs. They distribute as follows:

Quoting verbs	*Chicago Tribune*
Neutral structuring verbs	call, say (21), according to (2), ask (3), address, told
Metapropositional verbs	considered, fueled by, noted, insist, believe, vilified, embraced, have seized, highlight (2), demand, offering, argued, determine, noting
Descriptive verbs	stunned, scream, assailed
Transcript verbs	added (2)

Many of the sources included in the *New York Post*, the *TIME* and the *CNN* articles have been included in the *Chicago Tribune* article, which contains the most sources out of all the articles. This enables the possibility to compare the representation of the individuals and organizations across news outlets. In the *Chicago Tribune* article, the authors have made a noticeable choice about the representational strategies and the discrepancy between the representation of the anti- and pro-banning movements. The people working against the ban of books are twice as often represented through strategies that personalize them e.g., the personalization, individualization, specification, nomination and functionalization, and use of honorific status. A representative example of this is the introduction of Britten Follett:

> The politicalization of the topic is what's different than what I've seen in the past,' said Britten Follett, chief executive of content at Follett School Solutions, one of the country's largest providers of books to K-12 schools. 'It's being driven by legislation; it's being driven by politicians aligning with one side or the other. And in the end, the librarian, teacher or educator is getting caught in the middle'. (Alter and Harris, CT)

Here, Follett is both personally introduced by including her whole name, while simultaneously having her credibility heightened through the inclusion of her honorific as

chief executive. Adding additional information about the company further emphasizes the credibility of Follett, as she administrates one of the largest companies within this field and thus should be perceived as authoritative. The quoting verb utilized further contributes to her trustworthiness by introducing her statements without steering the reader in any particular direction in terms of interpretation. The usage of Follett's name introduces enough personal information to specify who the chief executive of Follett School Solutions is, while, at the same time, it does not diminish her professionalism. Follett is presented as authoritative and dependable, something that transfers onto her statements which have been conveyed unaltered to the reader. This combination points to the fact that the authors' choices work in Follett's favor, as this steers the reader to a positive understanding of her. An important note to make is that Follett's conclusion on this development is that it has become a political token for politicians to market themselves on and expose them to media attention, rather than an actual problem. This point is significant as it offers a possible explanation for the involvement of several Governors in local affairs.

The strategies utilized for Follett are also used in the representation of Suzanne Nossel, chief executive of free-speech organization PEN America and Christopher Finan, executive director of the National Coalition Against Censorship (Alter and Harris, CT). They are both introduced with some personal information - their full name - which is then followed up with their honorific status situating them in a powerful position in the debate. This indicates to the reader that their statements should be considered authoritative, as they represent whole organizations. As with Follett, they are solely represented through the quoting verb 'say' - thus their statements are not attached with any particular guidance for how to interpret them. This works in favor of their representation, as a reader would expect them to be authoritative with a certain amount of distance between them and the reader.

The representational strategies utilized when representing the pro-banning movement are like the ones employed when representing people against the ban: "Tiffany Justice, a former school board member in Indian River County, Florida, and a founder of Moms for Liberty, said that parents should not be vilified for asking if a book is appropriate. Some of the books being challenged involve sexual activity, including oral sex and anal sex, she said, and children are not ready for that kind of material" (Alter and Harris, CT). Justice is represented through personalization, individualization, specification, both nomination and functionalization, and lastly her honorific status. Firstly, Justice's full name is included in the article as well as her previous function as a school board member explaining her current honorific status as a founder of Moms of Liberty. By including both her previous and current

honorific status, it implicates to the reader her presumable motivation for founding Moms of Liberty and underpins her position in the debate. Another aspect that is similar to the representation of Follett is the usage of quoting verbs. Justice is represented through the two neutral structuring verbs 'say' and 'ask', which neutrally introduce her statements. As with Follett, her appearance is impartial, and the focus is on her honorific status. Justice represents the same motive for actions as the pro-banning movement in general - namely the sexually explicit content. She does however not refer to it as pornography but as 'sexual activity', and further specifies this as 'oral sex and anal sex'. Here, the explicit content is not connected with the term 'pornography', which is the first time different reasonings are offered when providing a motive for banning the books.

The same strategies are employed in the representation of the Governor of Virginia Glenn Youngkin and the Governor of Texas Greg Abbott, thus adding additional authoritative figures on the pro-banning side:

> The newly elected governor of Virginia, Glenn Youngkin, a Republican, rallied his supporters by framing book bans as an issue of parental control and highlighted the issue in a campaign ad […] In Texas, Gov. Greg Abbott demanded that the state's education agency 'investigate any criminal activity in our public schools involving the availability of pornography'. (Alter and Harris, CT)

The authors' usage of quoting verbs differs from the other examples. Concerning Youngkin and Abbott, the authors have chosen to mainly use metapropositional verbs such as 'rallied', 'highlight', and 'demand' all of which mark the authors' interpretation of the Governors and illustrate to the reader that these men should be interpreted as being motivated by emotions rather than making objective claims. For instance, the verb 'demand' highlights the fact that Abbott is making use of his power position and the reader should perceive him as a dominating individual. So, when compared to the authors' use of quoting verbs in general, this representation is seeking to directly influence the reader's interpretation of the Governors as powerful. Like the other articles, the authors here choose to include Abbott's description of the books as 'pornography' in the article, causing substantial damage to the queer community, as they distribute the harmful stereotype of queers being inherently hypersexual.

This representation has adopted an honorific representation focusing on their authoritative status as governors, while simultaneously employing quoting verbs that represents them as being regulated by their emotions rather than rational and scientific arguments. Therefore, the general representation of the governors is founded in both an emotional and an authoritative portrayal that seeks to influence the reader to perceive them

ambiguously - as unreliable and dependent on emotions rather than relieving on facts, yet also as a representant of the government e.g., the nation.

Apart from the specified representations of various individuals, the *Chicago Tribune* article also includes a variety of generic groups. Whereas those individualized were primarily anti-banning, the majority of generic groups represented in the article stem from the pro-banning movement. This is for instance the case when representing non-authoritative and local individuals: "Parents, activists, school board officials and lawmakers around the country are challenging books at a pace not seen in decades" (Alter and Harris, CT). Here, the reader cannot determine who these people are and how many they are. This distorts the transparency of how big an operation the pro-banning movement is, thereby indicating that a majority of the population is affected by this and consequently works for the pro-banning movement. It does however stand in clear contrast to the other utilized representational strategies, where the focus is on individualization and most of the individuals specified stem from the people for the anti-banning movement. So, this juxtaposition results in the generic and aggregated group appearing unreliable and unrecognizable to the reader, hence making it difficult to relate to their utterances and thus aligning the reader against them.

The generalized and aggregating strategies have also been employed when representing people working for the anti-banning movement. This is for instance the case with the protesters: "At a school board meeting where the book was debated, a group of students protested the ban and distributed free copies, while counterprotesters assailed it as pornography and occasionally screamed obscenities and anti-gay slurs, according to a student who organized the protest and posted video footage of the event" (Alter and Harris, CT). In this, it should be noted that the same strategies have been employed for both sides of the movement. By using the same strategy to represent both positions, the deliberate word 'protesters' used to describe both sides cancel out their respectable connotations, as they are equal in terms of representation and are therefore both presented as aggregated to the reader. The significance of both groups is thus discursively presented as equal. However, the utilized quoting verbs seek to align the reader alongside the anti-banning movement. Thus, the people working against the banning of books are represented through the metapropositional verb 'protested' which appears appropriate as it is a method for voicing socially acceptable disagreement. In contrast to this, the author has utilized two descriptive verbs when describing how the pro-banning movement has been demonstrated. These descriptive verbs are 'assailed' and 'screamed'.

According to Machin and Mayr, descriptive verbs "categorise the interaction" (60) by indicating the speaker's attitude towards what is said. The descriptive verbs indirectly signify something about the attitude, power structures, the credibility of the speaker, and the conversation they are engaged in. Thus, the descriptive verbs can either enhance or weaken the likeability and credibility of the speaker by making them appear emotional about their statement (Machin and Mayr 60). In the example, the two descriptive verbs have been employed in the representation of the counterprotesters demonstrating socially unacceptable behavior at a protest. In addition to this, it is further damaging to their representation when compared to the acceptable verb 'protest', which is utilized about the anti-banning movement, thus resulting in the reader aligning alongside the protesters rather than the counterprotesters.

In conclusion, the *Chicago Tribune* article has employed representational strategies, quoting verbs and verb processes in a way that aligns the reader alongside the anti-banning movement. This has been achieved through various measurements. One of them is that the majority of the represented speakers and statements stem from individuals, organizations, and aggregated groups working for the anti-banning movement. So, even though they have adopted a neutral representation for both sides, the number of people who represent the anti-banning movement exceeds the number of people representing the pro-banning movement, thus resulting in a representation that favors the anti-banning movement. This also indicates that the author, to a degree, seeks to punctuate the queer stereotypes that dominate the public discourse surrounding challenged queer literary content, while at the same time allowing space for their arguments for the banning of the books.

Summary of all four articles

The four articles all seek to include perspectives from both sides of the debate. They all include sources ranging from local personalized individuals who are directly affected by this, to authoritative figures speaking out on behalf of both the anti- and pro-banning movement. The purpose of including a wide range of voices associated with both sides of the cause is to present their arguments and to align the reader with one of two sides using representation strategies. These strategies subtly affect the reader's interpretation of the people included in the articles, as well as their statements and beliefs.

As all four articles have chosen to include quotes, where the sexually explicit content in the challenged books is equated with 'pornographic', the pro-banning movement presents this as their primary motive for targeting the two queer memoirs as well as the general

challenging and banning of books. By tying the notion of 'pornography' with *Gender Queer* and *All Boys Aren't blue*, the articles forward and cement a harmful stereotype about the queer community, and the damage this causes is considerable, as stereotypes confirming preestablished understandings are more memorable to the reader (Anderson 212). As a result, this connection will be first in mind when thinking about the queer community, rather than taking into consideration the complexity and normalcy of queer life. So, even though the authors sought to showcase both arguments from either side, favoring the anti-banning movement in three of four articles, the inclusion of a rigorous stereotype creates an imbalance, as the media outlets have chosen to connect two otherwise illusory correlations. Hence, they enforce the stereotype while simultaneously distributing it to millions of readers, who either already believe it or are now presented with the possibility to adopt it. This therefore cancels out the positive representation of the anti-banning movement through the use of several representational strategies, thus ultimately harming the queer community through their media coverage.

The political stance of each newspaper carries an influence on the chosen representation of the individuals included in the articles, as there was no noticeable favoritism of either leftist or rightist beliefs in their presentation of the ongoing struggles in the US regarding the continued rise of book challenges and bans. Mass media outlets carry a tremendous amount of importance in terms of setting up and defining societal norms. Therefore, it is crucial to investigate how the media use their privileged position in society and how they choose to represent the banned books, their authors, and the pro- and anti-banning movements. Kristin J. Anderson touches upon this notion of privilege:

> Privilege grants cultural authority to make judgments about others. It allows certain people to define reality and to maintain prevailing definitions of reality that fit their experience. Privilege means being able to decide who gets taken seriously, who receives attention, and it confers a presumption of superiority and social permission to act on that presumption without having to worry about being challenged (202).

The media's role in defining societal norms cannot be underestimated, as it is the public's primary source of information. So, when the media partakes in the creation of stereotypes by constructing connections between otherwise unrelated subjects and distributing this to the public, they become a vital and active contributor in the construction and distributing of simplified and one-sided representations of the queer community. This results in a heteronormatively simplified portrayal of the queer community, where harmful stereotypes linked to inherent hypersexuality become the dominant discourse, thereby limiting the

general understanding of what it means to be queer and therefore enhancing the chances of being condemned by the general public.

Gender Queer

Generally, the media focuses on hypersexual elements of the challenged and banned books, emphasizing how these sexual components can be compared to pornography and are thereby harmful to young readers. One of the books in question is Maia Kobabe's *Gender Queer*. Even though the memoir features sex and sexuality as key components, the overall intention of the book is not to display sex for the sake of sex, but instead to provide safe and accurate information for young adult readers (Waxman). It is therefore relevant to investigate how representation, in general, is portrayed in the memoir, as well as how the apparent sexual components are portrayed. This will showcase whether the focus of the media is truthful, or if there is a discrepancy between the representation in the media and the representation in the books.

On the back cover of *Gender Queer*, it is explained how the graphic novel is "an intensely cathartic autobiography about [Kobabe's] path to identifying as nonbinary and asexual, and coming out to eir family and society" (Kobabe). This description matches the description in the *New York Times* article "Book Banning Efforts Surged in 2021. These Titles Were the Most Targeted", where Kobabe's graphic novel is in 1st place. In the article, the graphic novel is described as follows: "In this 2019 illustrated memoir, Kobabe, who is nonbinary, explored questions surrounding sexuality and gender identity and the process of coming out as gender nonconforming" (Alter and Harris, NYT). It is therefore plausible to conclude that the graphic novel is centered around queer identity and the exploration of gender, sexuality, and identity in a contemporary societal context.

However, this description does not match the public perception of *Gender Queer* displayed in the media, as several media outlets relay statements from pro-banning institutions fighting to ban the book because of its 'pornographic' content. The representation of *Gender Queer* in the media acknowledges that sexuality and gender are vital themes in the book, but are primarily focused on how these themes can be interpreted as 'obscene' and focused on a display of hypersexual content. The *Chicago Tribune* article investigates different contemporary banned books, explaining that "[among] the most frequent targets are books about race, gender and sexuality, like [...] Maia Kobabe's "Gender Queer" (Alter and Harris, CT). They furthermore state that some of the books are being challenged due to their display of sexual activity, for instance oral sex and anal sex, where the governor of South

Carolina has asked for an investigation of "the presence of 'obscene and pornographic' materials in its public school, offering 'Gender Queer' as an example" (Alter and Harris, CT). It is therefore interesting to explore the apparent sexual components of *Gender Queer* from a narratological and multimodal perspective, as it can help investigate how these scenes present themselves to the reader and hence also the media. The selected example from *Gender Queer* will be the scene, where Maia receives oral sex on a strap-on from eir partner Z (Kobabe 166 - 167), as this example is deemed representational for the general sexual components of the memoir. Further supplementary examples depicting apparent sexual content from the novel will also be included.

Breaking the box: Intimacy, boundaries and a queer narrative voice

Maia Kobabe's graphic novel *Gender Queer* is subtitled 'a memoir' and this labeling sets forth a set of genre expectations. A memoir can be defined "as the literary face of a very common and fundamental human activity: the narration of our lives in our own terms" (Couser 9) and it "has become the central form of the culture: not only the way stories are told, but the way arguments are put forth, product and properties marketed, ideas floated, acts justified, reputations constructed or salvaged" (Yagoda 10). Memoirs are a contemporary literary medium for conveying certain ideologies, representations, and perspectives, and it is therefore plausible to assume that Kobabe's graphic memoir is no exception. A way to investigate these potential representations, ideologies, and perspectives is by using Michael Kearns' concept of rhetorical narratology in combination with Susan Lanser's notion of queer narrative voice, as it can uncover these potential representations in the narratological aspect of the novel, as well as investigate whether they express hypersexual content, or if they simply convey queer identity in connection to sex.

Narrator and focalizer are constructs within the rhetorical narratological category of voice that can express degrees of intimacy between narrator and reader. The concept of narrator can be explained through the scope of the hetero- and homodiegetic narrator, as well as intra- and extradiegetic narrator. The hetero- and homodiegetic indicate the placement of the narrator, where the homodiegetic narrator is present as a character in the story and the heterodiegetic narrator is absent from the story told (Kearns 101). Intra- and extradiegetic narrator relates to if the "narrating act [takes] place within the world it is about or within the narrated time frame, or does it take place outside that world or frame" (Kearns 101). The former indicates that the act occupies the intradiegetic level, whereas the latter approach indicates that the act is placed outside of the extradiegetic level (Kearns 101). The use of

homo- and heterodiegetic narrator indicates the relationship for the narrating situation, whereas intra- and extradiegetic indicate the level the narrating situation occurs.

Kobabe uses a homodiegetic narrator in *Gender Queer* that features on the intradiegetic level. In the scene where Maia explores oral sex with a strap-on with eir partner, e features as a homodiegetic narrator in the form of the main character, as well as the narrator of the scene - both characters situated within the story. At the beginning of the scene, Maia as an overall narrator of the story is presented: "Fast forward: We've been dating for two months. We've made out, we've had sex, we've moved on to sexting at work" (Kobabe 166). Maia as a 1st person narrator situated inside the narrative emerges in the following scene, where e reacts to eir partner's text messages when e is at work: "This is the most turned on I've ever been in my life. I am DYING" (Kobabe 166). Hereafter, a switch to Maia as a narrator narrating the story occurs again: "This is the visual I'd been picturing… But I can't feel anything. This was MUCH HOTTER when it was only in my imagination" (Kobabe 167). After this, it switches back to the narrator placed within the narrative, as the 1st person narrator asks Z to "try something else" (Kobabe 167). Firstly, because it is a memoir, the genre indicates that it is a narrative "composed from personal observation and experience" (Augustyn). This correlates with the use of a homodiegetic narrator, as Maia features using the 1st person narrator placed within the narrative as a character, as well as the overall narrator that guides the reader through the reading experience. Secondly, because it is a memoir written and told by Maia, where e figures as a character in the story, the narrative is therefore narrated at an intradiegetic level: "[the act] is within the world of the story and the time frame" (Kearns 101). Maia is both the author, the narrator, and the main character of the narrative. The use of a homodiegetic narrator at an intradiegetic level in combination with the genre characteristics for memoirs implicates an intimate relationship between reader and narrator, as the reader can draw a direct line between the narrative and the author behind the narrative. The reader can deduct how the scene where Maia and Z engage in oral sex is not imaginative, but instead a real event that correlates with Maia's personal experience in eir adulthood.

In addition to the position of the narrator, focalization is another component when analyzing and discussing degrees of intimacy between narrator and reader, and this position is closely tied to the narrator (Kearns 108). Drawing on the theoretical works of William Nelles, Kearns describes focalization as following: "Focalization is best understood as 'a *relation* between the narrator's report and the character's thoughts, to which the narrator either has no access, or has (and is limited to) access, or has (but is not limited to) access'" (Kearns 108).

Gender Queer is a narrative with internal focalization, as "[internal] focalization gives a reader the impression of seeing and hearing what a character sees and hears" (Kearns 110). Because it is a memoir based on Maia's life and therefore told through a 1st person homodiegetic narrator, it is internally focalized. With internal focalization, the narrator accounts for what the character knows and how they perceive their surroundings, which is true for *Gender Queer*. The use of internal focalization emphasizes the personal, as well as private ambiance of the story and because the reader is made aware of the personal character of the narrative, the retelling of Maia and eir partner's encounter with oral sex via a strap on dildo therefore feels explicit and intrusive, as it can be connected directly to the author of the book. The direct connection between author and narrator furthermore enhances the memoir as a queer memoir, since the experiences and discoveries associated with sexuality and gender are lived experiences and discoveries for Maia who identifies as queer.

The connection between narrator and author formed through the reader's perception can also be emphasized through the use of a narrative queer voice and to investigate this, Susan Lanser's categorical approach for queer narrative voice will be employed. Even though Lanser's model for analyzing and discussing queer voices is focused on fictional narrators, we believe that the theory is also applicable to Maia Kobabe's nonfiction memoir, as it can be contributory to an exploration of the narrator present in the narrative, as well as a discussion of what the implications of this type of narrator have on the overall interpretation of the story.

As Kearns' model for types of narrators clarified, *Gender Queer* utilizes a homodiegetic narrator on the intradiegetic level in the form of Maia as a 1st person narrator throughout the story. Lanser comments on this type of narrator in a queer context, stating that "[homodiegetic] narration may articulate queer sexuality in either implicit or explicit ways" (923). It is therefore interesting to investigate the different possible queer expressions for voice in *Gender Queer* to determine whether this statement is applicable or not. Lanser presents a framework of three categories for analyzing and discussing queer voice in a narrative context, where the first category is "(1) a voice belonging to a textual speaker who can be identified as a queer subject by virtue of sex, gender, or sexuality" (926). In *Gender Queer*, Maia Kobabe relays the story of eir childhood and upbringing, where the narrative is centered around eir sexuality and gender identity. It is therefore Lanser's first category that is suitable for this narrative, as it presents a distinct textual speaker identifiable as queer.

When approaching Lanser's category of a textually explicit queer narrative voice, one of the indicators for this type is whether the voice is out or closeted. In *Gender Queer*, the premise for the entire narrative is an openly queer narrator trying to navigate the strict social

conventions embedded in a heteronormative society. The prologue centers around Maia in graduate school, attending a class on autobiography wherein e must create a list of eir personal demons. On the list, Maia writes 'girly clothes', 'boobs', and 'getting my period' - all things normatively associated with the female gender. Maia concludes that "[all] of these are about gender" (Kobabe 6). Eir break from societally normative conventions associated with the female sex and gender indicates an openly queer narrator, as it emphasizes the very core of queer, namely that it is defined in direct opposition to normativity. Throughout the narrative, Maia explains how e does not identify as cisgender (Kobabe 145) and comes out as genderqueer (Kobabe 147), as well as how e identifies as bisexual and asexual (Kobabe 94 - 95) - all features that enhance how Maia is an openly queer narrator.

The correlation between Maia as an openly queer author and openly queer narrator in the story is also a component applicable to Lanser's category for textually present queer voices. Lanser explains how "[queering] has often relied on linkages to putatively queer authors – that is, on presuming that the narrator of a novel authored by a presumably queer writer is therefore presumably queer" (929). She furthermore explains how a "queering narrative voice asks us not to impose social qualities on narrators through external assumptions that cannot be textually sustained" (929). Nonetheless, the very premise of the memoir as a genre is that it is autobiographical nonfiction work and in the case of *Gender Queer*, it is therefore plausible to deduct that Maia as an openly queer author corresponds to the Maia situated within the narrative as a queer voice. The voice of *Gender Queer* is - in Lanser's words - 'marked' as an openly queer narrative voice, and the reader must therefore interpret the presented narrative through the scope of a queer voice.

An openly queer narrative voice also enhances the premise of the depiction of queer sex and sexual identity in *Gender Queer*, as the scene where Maia and eir partner engages in oral sex is inherently queer because it is performed and narrated by an openly queer narrator and character. The focus of the media has been centered around the sexual components, and the use of an openly queer narrator that can be linked to an openly queer author may increase the media's focus on these elements. As Kristin J. Anderson states, "part of heterosexual privilege is that heterosexual people do not have their entire humanity reduced to a single aspect of their lives: who they are intimate with" (222). So, it is possible to assume that there is a correlation between the heterosexualized conventions of contemporary society and the hyperfocus on sexual components in *Gender Queer*.

The choice to employ certain narrative tools strengthen the linkage between Kobabe as an openly queer author and Maia in the memoirs as an openly queer narrator. This results

in an intimate connection between reader and narrator, where the reader can connect the presented narrative with actual lived events. It impacts the overall interpretation of the sexual components of the memoir, as they appear personal and thereby intimate to the reader.

To be or not to be: A visual representation of queer sex and sexuality

Maia being an openly queer narrator poses the question of "how textual speakers characterise themselves as queer, whether they seem to be addressing queer or non-queer narratees, and how they construct authority and solicit empathy" (Lanser 928). To answer these questions, it is pertinent to include the concept of intersectionality, including markers such as gender, race, and class, as they are all vectors that can help shape narrative possibilities (Lanser 928). Because *Gender Queer* is a graphic novel, an analysis and discussion of the visual elements of the narrative will contribute to an exploration of how Maia as a queer narrator is presented visually, how visual components enhance or deduct queer elements of the overall narrative, as well as how the sexual components are conveyed to the reader. To further investigate the implications and reception of the sexual components by various US media outlets, the scene with Maia and eir partner Z engaging in oral sex will be the central point of analysis, as this scene is blatantly displaying sexual activity.

Representational meaning of the first component of multimodal discourse analysis as presented by Kress and van Leeuwen. Within the category, there are two subcategories: Narrative representation and conceptual representation. Conceptual patterns represent participants as generalized ideas, whereas narrative patterns are utilized to unfold actions, events, and processes (Kress and van Leeuwen 59). As *Gender Queer* is a graphic novel conveying the narrative of Maia Kobabe's childhood, upbringing, and adolescence, narrative patterns are the dominant feature in the story. Characteristic of narrative processes is the presence of vectors, which are "formed by depicted elements that form an oblique line, often a quite strong, diagonal line" and can be "formed by bodies or limbs or tools" (Kress and van Leeuwen 59). In the first image showing Maia wearing the strap-on, while Z performs oral sex on eir, the strap-on dildo emerging from - and apparently merging with - Maia's body becomes the vector of the image (Kobabe 167). It directs the viewer's gaze, instructing them on where to direct their attention. It is furthermore the central element of the story, thereby appearing salient and important to the overall narrative. In the following image, Maia's eye line becomes the vector, creating a reactional process. A reactional process is present when "the vector is formed by an eye line, by the direction of the glance of one or more of the represented participants" (Kress and van Leeuwen 67). In this situation, Maia becomes the

reactor, while Z becomes the phenomena that Maia reacts to (Kress and van Leeuwen 67). The central element of the scene is portrayed as the strap-on dildo, which is also the element that Maia reacts to in the following image (Kobabe 167). By enhancing this element, it is emphasized how this scene breaks with normative conventions socially established for heterosexualized concepts of sex. Yes, the strap-on is a central element, but in the following image wherein Maia, as a homodiegetic narrator narratively establishes that e does not feel safe going further with the experience and therefore stops Z, Maia breaks with the heteronormative imperative. Because Maia is depicted as the vector and therefore the salient element of the scene, e therefore carries significance to the overall interpretation of the scene and when e breaks with the heteronormative customs for sex, e emphasizes the overall queer narrative of the book - the reactional process embedded in the visual aspect of the scene furthermore supports this.

Interactive meaning relates to the interaction between producer and receiver of an image and is relevant when analyzing and discussing the interaction between different depicted elements in a visual (Kress and van Leeuwen 114). Within interactive meaning, the three subcategories are contact, social distance, and attitude. Contact is a visual component utilized to instigate contact between the interactive participants and the represented participants. Fundamentally, there is a difference between when represented participants create direct eye contact with interactive participants, and when they do not (Kress and van Leeuwen 117). In the scene where Maia and Z engage in oral sex, there is no direct contact made between the depicted participants and the viewer of the image (Kobabe 167). When an image addresses the viewer indirectly, the viewer is not the object, but instead the subject of the look, as there are no human or quasi-human participants in the image looking directly at the viewer to create contact (Kress and Leeuwen 119). This type of image can be classified as 'an offer', as "it 'offers' the represented participants to the viewer as items of information, objects of contemplation, impersonally" (Kress and van Leeuwen 119). Neither Maia nor Z demand something from the viewer but instead offers something - an informational scene about sexuality, gender, and consent. By not demanding something from the viewer, there is no 'image act' constituted and the viewer is therefore not encouraged to do anything other than observing (Kress and van Leeuwen 118 - 119). The viewer is not encouraged to engage actively with the scene, but instead to observe the exploration of sexual relations situated outside of the normative approach to sex and gender. Thus, the offer of the scene breaks with the pornographic allegations made in various media outlets, as it does not demand the viewer to engage with the content, but instead to observe the queer representative elements of the

scene. The intention is not to flaunt queer sex and sexuality, but instead to educate about the multiple nuances of sex in general.

The offer of the story applies to multiple sexually apparent scenes in the book. When Maia fantasizes about Plato's symposium, e is depicted with eir eyes closed, while the image depicting eir fantasy shows the two men in direct eye contact with each other but not the viewer (Kobabe 135). The same visual principle applies to the scene where Maia tells the story of how e was 11 or 12 years old when e first started fantasizing about having a penis (Kobabe 60 - 61). Again, Maia is shown with eir eyes closed, not engaging in direct visual eye contact with the viewer. Even though the scene seems sexually explicit, by not creating direct contact with the viewer, the image does not demand something from the viewer, but instead offers the viewer a glimpse into the multitude of aspects associated with the exploration and identification of queer sexuality and gender identity. In contrast to the direct eye contact between represented participants and the viewer, where the "producer uses the image to do something to the viewer" (Kress and van Leeuwen 117 -118), Kobabe does not try to influence the reader and therefore sway the reader's perception of the illustrated scenes associated with sex. Instead, the effect of the offer in the sexually apparent images of the story is to offer the viewer "items of information, objects of contemplation" (Kress and van Leeuwen 119). In doing so, Kobabe enhances the core object of the story, namely, to create a safe space for exploring sexuality and gender outside of the heterosexual normative conventions for sex.

Social distance is the second category for interactive meaning and relates to the distance between elements in an image. Kress and van Leeuwen explain how the size of frame is another dimension to interactive meaning, and that size of frame can be a way to indicate social distance (124). Size of frame relates to whether elements in an image are shown in close-up, medium shot, long shot, and so forth, and the chosen distance will suggest different types of relations between the viewer and the represented participants, where close distance will indicate intimacy and far distance will indicate disinterest (Kress and van Leeuwen 124).

When Z is shown from above, engaging in oral sex, they are shown in close shot; Maia realizing that e is not into it, stopping Z, is shown in medium shot; Maia and Z agreeing to stop and try something else is again shown in close shot again (Kobabe 167). The two scenes depicted in close shot become central, as they appear as the most intimate for the viewer. It enhances the sexual element within a queer sexual relation, as well as the need for consent when engaging in sexual relations in general. Furthermore, the interaction is depicted

at close personal distance, seeing that Maia and Z are shown with only their heads and shoulders (Kress and van Leeuwen 125). The distance can indicate the intimacy between viewer and participants, and it is thus possible to conclude that the viewer is invited into an intimate sphere between Maia and Z (Kress and van Leeuwen 125).

By inviting the viewer into a private sphere, the lack of social distance in the image enhances how the scene between Maia and Z is not rooted in a display of explicit sexual actions, but instead the exploration of sexual identity during adolescence and early adulthood. This representation of queer sexuality and gender identity is furthermore sedimented in the following scene, where Maia reflects on how "everything we did today was a good experience. But now that I've had sex a few times, I'm not sure I really need any more" (Kobabe 168). E goes on to explain how "[e] think the fact that I don't see myself as, or understand myself as, a female person, but that most of the people I interact with do … is actually damaging all of my relationships [...] Sex just throws this into high relief because it involves contact with genitals" (Kobabe 169). Again, Maia is depicted in close shot from eir shoulders and up and in close personal distance. The resemblance in social distance connects the two scenes, emphasizing how the central element of the scene is not the sexual activity, but instead the self-realization and -exploration associated with it. Maia's realization connected with sex and intimacy provides the sexually explicit scene with an intimate amplitude and the scene therefore becomes a signifier for a breakthrough in Maia's sexual identity and gender identity, rather than a pornographic scene included exclusively for its shock value.

Attitude is the last component of interactive meaning, and it is another element that can be indicative of relations between represented participants and the viewer (Kress and van Leeuwen 129). Alongside the choice between offer and demand, as well as the selection of size of frame, an angle for the image must also be chosen and this angle can be participatory in "expressing subjective attitudes towards represented participants, human or otherwise" (Kress and van Leeuwen 129). Important to note is that subjective does not mean individual, but instead means a socially and culturally coded attitude portrayed as subjective and unique (Kress and van Leeuwen 129). In Western culture, there are two kinds of images: Subjective and objective. Subjective images are images with a central perspective, hence there is a built-in perspective where the viewer can only see what is presented through a limited visual scope (Kress and van Leeuwen 130). In objective images, there is no central perspective, and the image thus reveals all elements to the viewer (Kress and van Leeuwen 130).

Both subjective and objective images are present in the scene with Maia and Z. In the first image, where Z engages in oral sex, Z is shown from above and the perspective is therefore chosen for the viewer of the image. However, in the following two images, there is no angle present, and the images are presented to the viewer with no perspective. This omission of perspective correlates with the offer of the images, as "[objective] images, then, disregard the viewer" (Kress and van Leeuwen 131). Contrasting to this, in the first image, where perspective is chosen for the viewer, "[the] point of view is imposed not only on the represented participants, but also on the viewer, and the viewer's 'subjectivity' is therefore subjective in the original sense of the word, the sense of 'being subjected to something or someone'" (Kress and van Leeuwen 131). This subjectivity is enhanced by the vertical angle of the image, and the vertical angle can be an indicator of power in an image. Kress and van Leeuwen explain the implications of the vertical angle as follows:

> [If] a represented participant is seen from a high angle, then the relation between the interactive participants [...] and the represented participants is depicted as one in which the interactive participant has power over the represented participant - the represented participant is seen from the point of view of power. If the represented participant is seen from a low angle, then the relation between the interactive and represented participants is depicted as one in which the represented participant has power over the interactive participant. If, finally, the picture is at eye level, then the point of view is one of equality and there is no power difference involved. (140)

By depicting Z from a high angle, the viewer gains power over the represented participant, namely Z. This angle reinforces the fragility of the scene, as it depicts something that mimics heteronormative approaches to sex, but in reality lies outside of the heteronormative societal conventions for sex. It also emphasizes the power that heteronormativity upholds in society, as the viewer - embodying the heterosexual imperative - is in power in the relation between interactive participant and represented participant. However, in the following two images where Maia and Z stop the intercourse and agree on trying something else, they are both depicted at an eye level (Kobabe 167). This illustrates two things. Firstly, there is equality between interactive and represented participants, as there is no power difference involved between the two (Kress and van Leeuwen 140). Secondly, it accentuates how the heteronormative conventions set in society are erased from the interpretation of the scene. By illustrating a queer sexual relation in a space founded on equality, queer relations are therefore presented as the new norm, instead of placed outside of the normative practices.

Compositional meaning is the third and last category for Kress and van Leeuwen, and within the compositional meaning, there are three subcategories: Information value, salience, and frame. For the interpretation and discussion of the scene between Maia and Z, salience and framing are relevant components and will therefore be included. They will furthermore be combined, as they - in combination with one another - enhance elements about the visual narrative indicative of the overall interpretation of the narrative. Salience relates to the enhancement of elements in a composition, indicating which elements are accentuated and should therefore be the primary focus for the reader (Kress and van Leeuwen 201). According to Kress and van Leeuwen, "salience can create a hierarchy of importance amongst the elements, selecting some as more important, more worthy of attention than others" and this importance is enhanced through visual clues (Kress and van Leeuwen 201). The most salient element in the visual will be perceived as the central message and this Kress and van Leeuwen calls 'the power of the centre' (202). Framing is an indicator of how connected or disconnected the elements in a composition are (Kress and van Leeuwen 203). It must be understood as a degree - framing, herein visual framing, can either be weakly or strongly framed, and "[the] stronger the framing of an element, the more it is presented as a separate unit of information" (Kress and van Leeuwen 203). Framing can be understood as a compositional tool for enhancing certain elements of importance by the use or the lack of framing, where framing is also contributory to the distinction of groupings of information.

In the scene between Maia and Z, wherein they engage in oral sex, the interaction between them happening outside of the actual sexual activity is accentuated as the central element through salience and framing. In the first image, where Z is shown from above, the color contrast between Z's skin and the plain background color enhances how the following scene features the act performed by Z as a key component (Kobabe 167). It furthermore creates a clear contrast between the background and the foregrounding element, underlining how Z is the most salient factor and thereby important for the viewer's interpretation.

However, the background color fades to a lighter shade of brown as Maia and Z communicate, agreeing to try something else. This stresses how the actual sexual encounter is not the central element for the overall significance of the scene, but instead how the most salient component of the narrative is the consent and exploration shared by Maia and Z. In the last image, where Maia and Z are shown holding each other, they appear as a unit to the viewer. This correlates with the concept of framing, as "[the] more the elements of the spatial composition are connected, the more they are presented as belonging together, as a single unit of information" (Kress and van Leeuwen 203 - 204). Their interaction becomes a single unit

to the viewer, highlighting how their interaction should be a central aspect of the overall interpretation. Lastly, as they are depicted in front of a plain backdrop, they are enhanced as the center of interpretation, as "foreground objects are more salient than background objects" (Kress and van Leeuwen 202). Framing and salience therefore become components that support the overall understanding of the scene between Maia and Z. Focus is not on the sexual activity itself, but instead on the connectedness between Maia and Z. By depicting them as a single unit of information, it is not possible to dissect the scene and only focus on the explicit sexual content as is done in the media coverage. Instead, it must be read as a whole, where the intention of the scene is augmented using salience.

Mirror, mirror on the wall: Queer representation in a heteronormative society

There are sexually explicit scenes in *Gender Queer,* and it is indisputable that these scenes are the prominent component of congestion in the media's representation of the book. The scenes, however, are not constructed to strictly express sex for the sake of sex. Instead, the scenes are included to maximize the representational spectrum of figuring out one's sexuality and gender identity. Representation as an overall theme for the narrative correlates with Kobabe's description of eir novel. In the *TIME* article, Kobabe is quoted stating that the memoir "aims to provide 'good, accurate, safe information' for queer high school students at a time when there's a lot of misinformation about gender identity exploration online" (Waxman). To further the argument that the explicit sex scenes in the book are important components to the overall representation of the novel, it is relevant to examine other examples of representation, as it, through comparison, will elucidate how the non-sexual and sexual scenes share representational qualities.

Throughout the story, Maia illustrates eir break with the heteronormative gender conventions associated with the female sex. In one scene, Maia tells the story of how e was on a field trip with eir third-grade class (Kobabe 20). In the scene, Maia sees eir dad take his shirt off and therefore replicates the action, which is met with scrutiny from eir classmates and teacher: "Some of my classmates noticed. 'Look! Maia took her shirt off LIKE A BOY!'. My teacher intervened. 'Maia, dear, you should put your shirt back on' [...] I walked back to put my shirt back on again. But I didn't feel that I had done anything wrong. It was everyone else being silly, NOT ME" (Kobabe 21 - 22). When the teacher is handing Maia eir shirt, Maia is placed on the left side of the illustration, and the teacher is placed on the right side of the illustration and these placements carry interpretative meaning. Within compositional meaning, information value relates to the placement of objects in an image, where the

placement "endows them with the specific informational values attached to the various 'zones' of the image" (Kress and van Leeuwen 177). These zones are left and right, top and bottom, and centre and margin (Kress and van Leeuwen 177). The zones of left and right are related to what is new and what is given information in a visual: "[When] pictures or layouts make significant use of the horizontal axis, positioning some of their elements left, and other, different ones right of the centre (which does not, of course, happen in every composition), the elements placed on the left are presented as Given, the elements placed on the right as New" (Kress and van Leeuwen 180 - 181). Maia on the left side of the image signifies given information - that e does not conform to societally enforced gender conventions, here exemplified by wearing a shirt on the beach, thus far in eir childhood. The placement of the teacher on the right side signifies a shift in Maia's perception of binary, heteronormative gender roles. By placing the teacher on the right side, thus endowing her with the significance of new information, the new in the constellation becomes Maia's first true encounter with society's expectations of gender roles and gender conventions. As Kress and van Leeuwen explains, the right side conveys key information about the visual and the reader must therefore pay close attention to this side, whereas the left side conveys given information, which is already part of the cultural setting (180). The new information in this scene is Maia's realization of how gender roles are solidly embedded in social and cultural settings, where the given is what Maia further exemplifies throughout the story - that gender identity and sexual identity are not deliberate choices, but rather something natural.

Another example of Maia's break with the heteronormative imperative is in the scene where Maia gets eir hair cut professionally for the first time. When asked what style e wants, Maia explains that it should be "not too grown up" and "kind of boyish" (Kobabe 79). What e really means is "not too feminine" and "kind of gay" (Kobabe 79), but that is not what the hairdresser delivers, and Maia is disappointed when the haircut is over. However, Maia's mum cuts eir hair shorter, which makes e happy and content (Kobabe 81). The contentment is solidified in the public's reaction, where Maia recounts how someone asked if e was "Phoebe's older brother" and addresses eir as a "young man" (Kobabe 81). To this, Maia exclaims that e "loved it" (Kobabe 81). In this scene, Maia breaks with the heteronormative gender expectations through the cutting of eir hair. Long hair is generally associated with female traits and heteronormative gender roles, whereas short hair is culturally associated with more masculine traits. By cutting eir hair short, thereby appearing stereotypically male to the public, Maia breaks the binary gender expectations and steps outside of the heteronormative conventions set for eir sex by cultural and social institutions.

The break from the heteronormative imperative is also illustrated in the scene, where Maia and eir sister Phoebe go shopping for underwear for Maia (Kobabe 180 - 184). When Maia discovers that the store does not carry the type of underwear e has been wearing the entire time e has been getting eir period, Maia panics and Phoebe directs eir to the boy's section instead. Maia's response solidifies how this has not been an option for eir previously: "Wait, is that an option?" (Kobabe 182). By enhancing how shopping in the boy's section has not previously crossed Maia as an option for underwear, the engrained binary gender conventions set for the male and female sex are emphasized - Maia could not phantom shopping in the boy's section but has instead made do with what e could find in the girl's section. Maia's concluding thoughts to eirself after having bought eir first pack of boy underwear congeal this fact: "Why did I waste so many years buying underwear that I hated?" (Kobabe 184). Even though the mere act of buying underwear in the girl's section has caused Maia distress and sorrow, it still did not occur to Maia that underwear from the boy's section was an option, thereby enhancing how implanted heteronormative gender constructs are in society.

By buying the underwear from the boy's section, Maia, again, breaks with the heteronormative imperative and, as a result, presents the reader with an option for exploring gender preferences situated outside of the binary constellations presented by a heteronormative society. The haircut, as well as the underwear, are not depictions of spite for the heteronormative gender conventions, but instead displays of representations. By illustrating choices that are placed outside of normative gender conventions, Maia offers the reader a safe space for exploring and questioning their sexuality and gender identity, as well as the choices associated with their assigned and preferred gender identity.

These breaks with the heteronormative imperative enhance Judith Butler's point from "Critically Queer" (1993), wherein she argues that gender is not a deliberate choice chosen by the subject:

> The misapprehension about gender performativity is this: that gender is a choice, or that gender is a role, or that gender is a construction that one puts on, as one puts on clothes in the morning, that there is a 'one' who is prior to this gender, a one who goes to the wardrobe of gender and decides with deliberation which gender it will be today. This is a voluntarist account of gender which presumes a subject, inact, prior to its gendering. (21)

Gender cannot be detached from the individual. Performativity is not about choosing a gender, but is rather constructed via social and cultural practice, where the individual is

subjected to these practices. Throughout eir childhood and adolescent years, Maia is subjected to a set of expectations associated with eir gender that Maia does not align eir gender expression with. These gender conventions associated with the female gender are not conventions that Maia has deliberately chosen to perform, but instead conventions that e has been subjected to through social and cultural practices. By illustrating a break with these conventions through eir actions that are contrary to with is normatively associated with heteronormative gender expectations, Maia offers a literary space wherein gender representations situated outside of the heteronormative imperative can be offered as a viable option for young people to explore their sexuality and gender identity.

Even though *Gender Queer* seems to be a literary work centered around sexuality and gender representation, this theme does not reflect the reception in several media outlets across the US. Harmful stereotypes associated with the queer community can be explanatory to the misrepresentation of the intended purpose of the book. In the article "Reading the Queer Domestic Aesthetic Discourse. Tensions between celebrated stereotypes and lived realities" (2015), Brent Pilkey explains how "[stereotypes] linked to minority sexuality have a long history in the West; they have been embraced by some and simultaneously used as insult by the mainstream" (216), stating that stereotypes "certainly impact daily lives for many people" (218). A stereotype associated with the queer community is that queer people are inherently hypersexual, where they make a deliberate choice to display sex and sexuality that does not conform to the heteronormative imperative in public spaces, and it is this openness that is misinterpreted as 'flaunting it' (Anderson 194).

One explanation for the creation of this stereotype is what Jack Halberstam calls the queer temporality. In the book *In A Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (2005), Jack Halberstam explains how "[queer] subcultures produce alternative temporalities by allowing their participants to believe that their futures can be imagined according to logics that lie outside of those paradigmatic markers of life experience— namely, birth, marriage, reproduction, and death" (14). He furthermore explains how "part of what has made queerness compelling as a form of self-description in the past decade or so has to do with the way it has the potential to open up new life narratives and alternative relations to time and space" (13). The sexually explicit scenes in *Gender Queer* appear explicit because they illustrate sexual relations that lie beyond the heteronormative conventions for sex, therefore offering a queer temporality. This temporality seems unfathomable to a heteronormative scope, which in turn deducts the representation to a harmful stereotype of queer relationships - sexual, as well as romantic - are inherently hypersexual, where they

flaunt it to provoke society. Kristin J. Anderson comments on this complexity associated with sexual relations placed outside of the heteronormative conventions, stating that "heterosexuals do not run the risk of being reduced to a single aspect (sex) of their lives, as if being heterosexual summed up the kind of person they are. Instead, they can be viewed and treated as complex human beings who happen to be heterosexual" (204). This highlights the damaging nature of viewing the queer community as stereotypically hypersexual. In doing so, the queer community is reduced to the act of sex and in the case of *Gender Queer*, the representation present throughout the narrative is erased and replaced by the label of pornography.

All Boys Aren't Blue

Due to the discrepancy between the media's representation of the themes of *All Boys Aren't Blue* and Johnson's description of the motive of the memoir, it is relevant to investigate how representation is displayed in the book. For this purpose, rhetorical narratology will be applied, as it will help elucidate the representation narratological expressed, as well as how this potential narratological representation might be perceived by a reader. Multimodal discourse analysis will furthermore be utilized as a supplement to the narratological analysis, as it can help uncover the representation embedded in the accompanying visuals for the memoir. As Johnson's memoir is primarily a written narrative, rhetorical narratology will be the primary theoretical approach. Photographs from Johnson's personal life are included in the book, and these images alongside the cover of the book will be discussed through the theoretical scope of multimodal discourse analysis as a supplement to the narratological analysis and discussion.

Provocation or education? Queer narrative voice and representation

In Florida, a member of the school board "wants someone to be criminally prosecuted for allowing a young-adult memoir for Black queer boys on school library shelves" (Chavez). The young adult memoir in question is George M. Johnson's memoir *All Boys Aren't Blue*. The book is discussed and criticized across multiple US schools, where several states take action to ban the book from school libraries. One of the main critiques of the book is that it promotes the queer community (Alter and Harris, CT; Chavez), as well as pornographic content (Alter and Harris, CT; Chavez). Johnson acknowledges that the content of the book is partially centered around sexuality, stating that the "book will touch on sexual assault (including molestation), loss of virginity, homophobia, racism, and anti-Blackness" (viii). In

Johnson's words, sexuality is only a part of the thematic of the book. The purpose of the book is not the flaunting of sexuality, but instead a manifestation of representation: "These discussions at times may be a bit graphic, but nonetheless they are experiences that many reading this book will encounter or have already encountered. And I want those readers to be seen and heard in these pages" (Johnson viii). The intention of the memoir is therefore not sex and sexuality for the sake of sex and sexuality, but instead various perspectives of sex and sexuality for the purpose of representation for the young adult readers of the memoir, which is the intended audience for the book.

Johnson is not surprised about the resistance their book has been met with since publication, stating that they were prepared for the book being challenged by the public, because "in America people have an issue with books that tell the truth, and my book tells the truth" (Chavez). Johnson goes on to explain how their book is aimed at a young adult audience, and in relation to the targeted audience, Johnson explains how "[removing] books from them doesn't stop them from having those same experiences. It just stops them from being able to know what to do when those experiences happen to them" (Chavez). The narrative in *All Boys Aren't Blue* should therefore be considered a guiding hand for adolescent youth, wherein they can reflect on the experiences lived by Johnson, as they retell "their experiences growing up in New Jersey and Virginia as a Black, queer and non-binary person" (Chavez). In the chapter "Introduction: Black. Queer. Here", Johnson recounts the reasoning behind writing the memoir. They explain how the book is centered around the intersectionality of their personality, stating how the book is "an exploration of two of my identities - Black and queer - and how I became aware of their intersections within myself and in society" (5). Identifying within the queer community as a person of color is not without repercussions, and Johnson relates these repercussions to the heteronormative imperative: "I believe that the dominant society establishes an idea of what 'normal' is simply to suppress differences, which means that any of us who fall outside of their 'normal' will eventually be oppressed" (6).

Within the field of rhetorical narratology, the concept of narrative should be understood "primarily as a rhetorical act rather than as an object", as it is "a purposive communication of a certain kind from one person (or group of persons) to one or more others" (Phelan and Rabinowitz, "Narrative as Rhetoric" 3). This understanding of narrative in a rhetorical narratological scope can be shortened to the following statement: "*Narrative is somebody telling somebody else, on some occasion, and for some purposes, that something happened to someone or something*" (Phelan and Rabinowitz, "Narrative as Rhetoric" 3).

This definition of narrative also indicates that Johnson's memoir is a narrative purposively structured to enhance a certain theme or ideology. A topic Johnson themselves touches upon in the author's note, wherein they explain how "this book was crafted with care and love, but most importantly to give a voice to so many marginalized communities whose experiences have not yet been captured between the pages of a book" (viii). Because the media's representation of Johnson's memoir does not correlate with Johnson's description, the following analysis and discussion of the narrative will therefore take point in the sexually explicit scenes in the book to further investigate how these scenes are portrayed and how sex and sexuality in general are narratively conveyed. However, it is first relevant to establish what kind of narrator is utilized in the narrative, as it will help explore the narrative choices in the text.

"One of the most important choices an author makes is about the *kind* of narrator to employ" (Phelan and Rabinowitz, "Narrator" 33). In *All Boys Aren't Blue*, Johnson utilizes a homodiegetic narrator, which is characterized by the narrator being present as a character in the narrative (Kearns 101). The homodiegetic narrator is exemplified in the author's note, where Johnson themselves explains the reasoning for writing the memoir: "In writing this book, I wanted to be as authentic and truthful about my experience as possible. I wanted my story to be told in totality: the good, the bad, and the things I was always too afraid to talk about publicly" (Johnson vii). The first sentence of the actual memoir furthermore emphasizes the homodiegetic narrator, as it states that "[the] story of how I entered the world was a foreshadowing" (Johnson 1). In the author's note, Johnson furthermore explains how it is their story being told, thereby placing themselves as a character within the narrative. The use of a homodiegetic narrator creates a personal relationship between the narrator and reader, as the reader can relate the told narrative directly to the author of the book. This personal connection is furthermore accentuated by telling the story on an intradiegetic level. The narrative occurs on an intradiegetic level, as "the narrating act [takes] place within the world it is about or within the narrated time frame" (Kearns 101). The narrative is structured to mimic Johnson's childhood and upbringing, describing their experiences as a queer person of color, thereby placing Johnson as a homodiegetic narrator on the intradiegetic level. Concerning the media's focus on the sexually explicit content of the narrative, the use of a homodiegetic narrator on an intradiegetic level increases the reader's attention to the authenticity of the memoir. Because Johnson as an author and Johnson as a homodiegetic narrator is the same, the reader can relate the sexually explicit content directly to an actual person, instead of disregarding it as fictitious.

In terms of focalization, *All Boys Aren't Blue* is a narrative with internal focalization, because Johnson as a narrator correlate to Johnson as a character within the narrative. The narrator of the story therefore says what the character within the story knows and perceives (Kearns 109). This is exemplified in the chapter "Identity", wherein Johnson tells of their name and how this name is associated with mixed feelings. In the first paragraph of the chapter, Johnson's grandmother asks a favor of them: "'Matthew… MATTHEW!!!' Nanny was yelling for me. 'What?' 'Don't you *what* me, boy'. I ran downstairs and stood in front of the big chair in the living room where Nanny sat" (Johnson 36). This exemplifies how Johnson is both a character within the narrative, here enhanced through the use of direct speech, but also the narrator of the story, as they relay the events of the story to the reader simultaneously. Kearns comments on this stating that "if the narrating act is either homodiegetic or intradiegetic (that is, if the narrator is telling his or her own story or is otherwise located within the world of the story), then I term this an example of internal focalization, in which narrator and focalizer are identical" (110). The viewpoint of the narrative is thereby placed with Johnson, who, by a homodiegetic narrator on an intradiegetic level, relays their personal and private experiences to an audience.

The narrative choices for narrator and focalizer correlate with the genre of memoir, as it enhances how the narrative is told through personal observation and experience (Augustyn). It also correlates with Lanser's concept of the open queer narrative voice, which is characterized by a voice connected to a textual speaker that can be identified as queer (Lanser 926). As *All Boys Aren't Blue* is a personal memoir told by Johnson themselves, the narrative and thereby narrator is centered in Johnson's narrative voice. Because Johnson is an openly queer person, it can therefore be concluded that it is Lanser's first category for queer narrative voices, namely "(1) a voice belonging to a textual speaker who can be identified as a queer subject by virtue of sex, gender, or sexuality" (Lanser 926), that applies to the memoir. A key component for Lanser's category of textual narrative speakers identifiable as queer is whether the narrative voice is open or closeted, "that is, between voices sexually self-named and voices open to contestation" (Lanser 927). The proposition for Johnson's memoir is a personal narrative rooted in their own experience as a queer person of color, thereby disclosing the narrative voice as openly queer from the beginning. As Johnson states, the book is an exploration of their intersection identity of being Black and queer, elaborating on how "[because] this is a memoir, I'm sharing some of my personal memories with [the reader]" (5). Concerning the outed narrator, Lanser distinguished between "a narrator who is 'out' to the extradiegetic narratee who stands in for the reader from a narrator 'out' only to

another character within the represented world" (928), where Johnson's narrator falls into the former category. Because there is a direct correlation between Johnson as a narrator within the narrative, and Johnson as an author, the outed narrative voice is out to the reader within and outside the story. It makes the narrative explicitly queer, as queer becomes the cornerstone for the reading of the narrative.

This direct correlation between the queer narrative voice within the story and Johnson as an openly queer author corresponds with Lanser's concept of the queer narrative voice, namely how 'queering' has often relied on a connection between an openly queer author and a queer narrative voice by assuming that an openly queer author equals a queer narrative voice (Lanser 929). However, because *All Boys Aren't Blue* is characterized as a memoir, the genre conventions dictate a direct linkage between the author and narrative voice; the narrative voice is the author's voice, as the presented narrative is an autobiographical nonfiction narrative. This direct relation between Johnson as an author and the openly queer narrative voice furthermore emphasizes the personal nature of the narrative. Because the openly queer narrative voice can be connected to Johnson themselves, the reader can therefore deduct that the experiences conveyed by the queer narrative voice in the story are Johnson's own experiences.

The primary critique of the book in the media coverage is that it appears overly sexual, flaunting pornographic and obscene elements for young readers. The genre conventions for memoirs, as well as the narratological choices made in the memoirs, create the opportunity for the reader to connect the sex scenes in the book with the author's actual life. This establishes an almost too intimate connection, where the reader can feel like they are intruding on a personal sphere that seems too private for public viewing. The genre conventions and narratological choices therefore impact the overall perception of the book, as they intensify the reading experience and interpretation of the sexual components. However, sex and sexuality are key themes in the book, and they are not intended to provoke, but instead to educate and enlighten young adult readers about the diversity of queer sex and sexuality.

Let's talk about sex, baby: The heteronormative imperative versus queer sexuality
Two chapters in *All Boys Aren't Blue* are centered around sex and sexuality. In "Boys Will Be Boys…", Johnson retells the story of their first sexual encounter at 13 years old, when their cousin instigates oral sex during a sleepover at their grandmother's house. In this chapter, Johnson features as a narrator and a character within the narrative through a

homodiegetic scope. It is written in retrospect, allowing Johnson to reflect on whether they should tell the story, as well as how the events unfolded that night between them and their cousin. The opening sentence of the story sets the scene: "I was about thirteen years old when it happened [...] You asked if you could stay with us, which my mother said was fine. You were a cool cousin, older by about four or five years" (Johnson 199 - 200). This tells the reader that the interaction about to be described occurs between family members, where Johnson themselves is one of those members. Then, Johnson situates themselves within the narrative as a character through direct speech: "I remember you started whispering to me. [...] 'Matt. You awake?' This time I whispered back, 'Yes.' [...] You then asked me, 'Do you feel that?' 'Yeah.' But I laughed and said 'Get your hand off my butt.'' You giggled. 'That's not my hand'" (200-201). An openly queer homodiegetic narrator is employed in this scene, resulting in the scene being read as inherently queer.

Moreover, because Johnson figures as a narrator and character within the scene, the reader can furthermore relate the scene directly to Johnson as an openly queer person and this connection furthers the personal ambiance of the reading experience. As sexual relations between family members are prohibited, the scene is also tainted with a sense of wrongness, thereby connecting queer with the forbidden. However, Johnson does not include this interaction in their memoir to promote sexual relations between family members, Instead, they are retelling their first sexual experience to explicate the conflicting feelings of a queer teenager: "It was the first time I had ever touched a penis that wasn't my own. I knew what was happening wasn't supposed to happen. Cousins weren't supposed to do these things with cousins. But my body didn't react that way. My body on the inside was doing something, too" (Johnson 201 - 202). The feeling inside them is centered around queerness - around sex between same-sex couples, and how they always assumed that sex and relationships should only be between a male and a female:

> I knew that relations and relationships could only be between a boy and girl. I never even imagined a day would come when I would be able to explore what I had always felt inside [...] it felt so right for a boy who always felt that he was wrong. To know someone else was having those same feelings validated everything going on inside of me. I knew it wasn't fake. (Johnson 202)

This scene contains duplicity of complex emotions. On one side, Johnson knows that what is happening between them and their cousin is not right. Sexual relationships should not occur between family. However, on the other side, Johnson also realizes that sex is not contained to the heteronormative imperative that has dominated their view of sex and relationships thus

far. Through this sexual experience, they are validated in their sexual and romantic feelings that are not contained to the binary opposition of boy and girl. Even though it feels wrong because of the partner with whom the experience occurs, the feelings that arise within Johnson relating to gender, sex and sexuality are finally reciprocated and therefore validated. This realization is also enhanced when Johnson proclaims how "[the] whole time I knew it was wrong, not because I was having sexual intercourse with a guy, but that you were my family" (204). This sentence separates the two feelings at play within this interaction - family and sex. It furthermore accentuates how queer sex is not wrong, and that exploring one's sexuality outside of the heteronormative scope is a natural part of one's adolescence. The scene is not about sex for the sake of sex, nor is it included for its shock value. As Johnson concludes at the end of the chapter, it is important to "tell our story to a generation of young explorers who need to know your truth and mine. You were a boy who wasn't blue and for the twenty-nine years you were here, you lived in the gray" (212). In a society, where being queer and queer sexuality is deemed the minority, the chapter about Johnson's first sexual encounter illuminates an aspect of sexuality that is otherwise overlooked in societal and cultural contexts. As Johnson states, the story is about "[two] boys lost in a society who found each other's sexuality as a home" (198). Queer sex and sexuality are complicated aspects, and by shedding a light on it within their memoir, Johnson provides a nuanced perspective on sexuality and the questions (and reactions) that can arise when exploring sexual preferences situated outside of the heterosexual imperative.

When Johnson is older and attending college, the topic of sex emanates again. In the chapter "Losing My Virginity Twice", they again explore the topics of queer gender, sex, and sexuality through their own experiences. The heteronormative imperative is deeply rooted within Johnson's perception and sexuality, so much that they "never daydreamed about sex with another boy. When I *did* think about sex, I was a girl having sex with a boy" (262). According to Johnson, "there was not much mainstream queer representation back then, and [their] high school taught sexual education in a very archaic way" (262 - 263). They go on to explain how they "didn't learn about sex between two men" (263), as the sex education system was structured around heteronormative sexual relations, thereby neglecting information about queer sex and sexuality. Their romantic and sexual feelings towards boys were not reflected in mainstream romantic portrayals, not even in pornography - in these public portrayals, it was "mostly between men and women, and they were excited and confident with each other" (Johnson 263 - 264). Because an openly queer homodiegetic narrator is employed in the narrative and moreover, a narrator that can be directly connected

to an openly queer narrator, the chapter centered around queer sex can therefore be read through a nonfiction lens wherein the personal and private character of the story is enhanced. The intention of Johnson's chapter is therefore to offer the reader a nuanced display of queer sex with an educational purpose in mind, seeing that they never received queer-inclusive sex education throughout their childhood and adolescence.

During Johnson's first sexual encounter with another boy instigated on their terms, they use pornography as a reference for how sex should be. Johnson is a virgin, but their sexual partner is not, hence they do not want to come off as inexperienced: "I didn't want to let him know I was inexperienced [...] He didn't know I was a virgin, and I did my best to act dominant like my favorite porn star. I was an actor and this was my movie" (266). As Johnson mentions at the beginning of the chapter, there has been slim to no queer sex representation in mainstream media, nor queer-centered sex education throughout their adolescence. What has been presented to them is a heteronormative based representation of sex and sexual relations, even in pornographic contexts. Johnson is therefore compelled to mirror the heteronormative conventions portrayed in pornography, as it is the only insight they have into the regulations, conventions, and workings of sex. In this context, pornography is not a medium to convey hypersexuality, but instead, a means for Johnson to draw experience and expectations for what is about to unfold between them and their first sexual partner.

Throughout the experience, Johnson reflects on their past sexual encounter with their cousin, stating that "[for] once, I was consenting to the sexual satisfaction of my body. This moment also confirmed that sex could look how I wanted it to look. And that it could be passionate and kind, but most importantly, fun and satisfying" (266). By connecting this experience with past sexual experiences throughout their life, Johnson highlights to the reader how sex should first and foremost be consensual, but also that sex can be queer, and that queer sex is valid in an otherwise heterosexualized society. They reflect on how their "first sexual experiences would have been like had I been given the ability to learn about what queer sex was when all my straight friends and classmates got to learn about what it looked like for them" (273), concluding that "[my] queer sexuality was one big, risky crash course, much like the other aspects of my queer existence" (Johnson 273). This emphasizes the educational nature of the chapter. Even though it is themed around sex, retelling Johnson's first sexual experiences with queer sex, the very essence of sex is not the primary component of the chapter. Instead, it is an educational display of sex outside of the heteronormative imperative. As Johnson states, "[there] is so much danger in not providing proper education

about sex to kids, especially for those who are having sex outside of the heteronormative boxes" (273), explaining how "[the] risk factors for queer people engaging in sex continue to be higher than that of all other communities" (274). By writing a chapter wherein they recount how a lack of queer sexual education has shaped their experience, as well as how they had to mirror heteronormative sex as it was the only sex education available, Johnson manages to create an educational safe space for queer adolescence where they can learn from their experiences and thereby be better equipped to enter queer sexual relations.

The heteronormative imperative is the dominating societal factor, even within sexuality and sex education, which negatively impacts queer youths, as they are obtained from proper sex education by the heterosexualized conventions dominating society. *All Boys Aren't Blue* provides a queer space wherein this queer sex education becomes available for young people, and this accessibility correlates with the targeted audience, namely young adult literature. One of the characteristics of YA is that it is a platform for openly exploring and discussing identity, gender, and sexuality in the formative years of adolescence. In the article "The Discursive (De)Construction of Queer Identity in Six Young Adult Novels", James R. Gilligan explains how "[s]exual identity development itself may in fact be understood as a queer experience insofar as it lacks any definitive stability", where the construction of narrative functions as a way "to attempt to bring clarity and stability to the ambiguity of sexuality and the instability of identity development" (49). By proposing a narrative centered around queer sex and sexuality narrated by an openly queer homodiegetic narrator, the essence of the chapter "Losing My Virginity Twice" is not sex in a pornographic manner, but instead a representation of queer sex through the eyes of a queer person. The narrative choices enhance this purpose, thereby counteracting the media's hypersexualized focus interpretation of the book. On the American Library Association's website, a list of the top 10 challenged books of 2021 is listed, whereon *All Boys Aren't Blue* is listed as number three. They state that the book is "[banned] and challenged for LGBTQIA+ content, profanity, and because it was considered to be sexually explicit" (ALA, "Top 10"). However, in Johnson's own words, "[sex] is a part of growth as a human regardless of gender and sexual identity. No one has the right to deny us the resources we need to properly engage with one another" (275). They acknowledge that sex and sexuality are complex dimensions and by denying queer adolescents sex education and representation throughout their formative years, the heteronormatively dominated society is putting young people at risk. This is their primary intention for the inclusion of graphic sex scenes in the memoir - to provide a safe space wherein young adults can learn through Johnson's own personal experiences growing up

queer and questioning. As they explain, they are aware of the potential repercussions from the public, but it is worth it for providing available queer representation: "Will this part of my story be met with pushback? Absolutely. But I'll be damned if I don't tell it because of fear. My greatest fear is that queer teens will be left to trial and error in their sexual experience. It's worth me feeling a little embarrassed so that you all are a bit more prepared" (Johnson 276).

The visibility of queer: The inclusion of visual aids as queer representation

The visual artwork accompanying the written narrative enhances Johnson's attempt to call out the reader and make them pay attention to the intention of the story, namely queer representation for a young adult audience. In the book, Johnson has included pictures from their childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood. All the photos are in black and white, and the choice of color or lack thereof correlates with the modality of the images. According to Kress and van Leeuwen, modality is tied to whether a visual presentation is portrayed as truthful or not (154). This does not mean that truth can claim absolute truth or untruth, but instead "whether a given 'proposition' (visual, verbal or otherwise) is represented as true or not" (Kress and van Leeuwen 154). There are six images in total within the book, all in black and white and all lacking in sharpness. The choice of printing the personal images from Johnson's childhood and upbringing in black and white results in the images being presented as generic presentations of a queer childhood, rather than direct references to their specific upbringing. Because of the lack of color, it can be said that "the more that is taken away, abstracted from the colours of the representation, the more colour is *reduced*, the lower the modality" (Kress and van Leeuwen 159). By completely removing the color from the images, the absolute truth is reduced in the images, as they are not direct representations of how the images looked when they were taken. As Kress and van Leeuwen explains, "the dominant criterion for what is real and what is not is based on the appearance of things, on how much correspondence there is between what we can 'normally' see of an object, in a concrete and specific setting, and what we can see of it in a visual representation" (158 - 159). The viewer knows that the participants and objects presented in the images were not black and white in real life, which therefore emphasizes how these images were altered into a presented narrative and therefore eludes the absolute truth in terms of representation.

The low modality is furthermore enforced by the use of blurriness, which Kress and van Leeuwen terms representation (161). Representation, when connected to modality, relates to "a scale running from maximum abstraction to maximum representation of pictorial detail"

(Kress and van Leeuwen 161). While some of the images are sharper than others, the general representation of the images included as a visual supplement for the written narrative is a noticeable degree of blurring. In combination with the black and white color saturation, the blurriness amplifies the degree of general representation that the images have come to present. The images thus have a dual purpose. They are of course representations of Johnson's actual life and chosen to carefully curate the written narrative, but they are also general representations of growing up Black and queer in America. This makes the images relatable to queer young adult readers, as the visual construction of the images included in the book enables the reader to relate their own experiences to Johnson's experiences growing up. Therefore, the images support the overall intention of the written narrative, namely to present various scenarios that offer a platform from which young queer people can mirror their own experiences and questions regarding sex, sexuality, gender, and identity.

The Conservative-Christians versus the queer temporality: A discussion about the evolution of American society, culture and values

There is a prominent difference between how the books are portrayed in several US media outlets and how the books represent themselves. The media and Right-Winged conservatives explicitly focus on the sexual component of the memoirs, labeling them as pornographic and obscene. However, both memoirs signify a diverse presentation of the queer community, conveying experiences and educational content about gender identity and sexuality for a young adult audience amidst their formative years. So, it can be concluded that the sexual aspects in the memoirs are not as notable a component of the overall narrative as they are made out to be by the media coverage. This indicates an outburst of moral panic from the media, Right-Winged politicians, and organizations working for the pro-banning movement, resulting in an overreaction. It leads to follow-up questions such as why this reaction, what circumstances might trigger this movement, and if it has any related instances throughout history.

Stanley Cohen's concept of *moral panic* explains the escalation of the situation. In *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers* (2011), Cohen states that:

> Sometimes the object of the panic is quite novel and at other times it is something which has been in existence long enough, but suddenly appears in the limelight. Sometimes the panic passes over and is forgotten, except in folklore and collective memory; at other times it has more serious and long-lasting repercussions and might

produce such changes as those in legal and social policy or even in the way that

society conceives itself. (1)

So, even though books about queer gender identity have been around long before this moral panic, it does not provide protection from being in the limelight. The difference might be that the situation has reached a boiling point where actions must be taken. A contributing factor to this escalation could be the media's heavy coverage of the subject, thus making it a household topic of discussion. According to Cohen, the mass media holds the most influential position in this escalation, as they are the primary source of news for the public, and hence, they shape the public's shared perception of emerging concepts such as the queer community (9-10).

A significant aspect to note in this is that the public receives information second-hand, as the mass media has processed the material and chosen a certain angle, meaning "the information has been subject to alternative definitions of what constitutes 'news' and how it should be gathered and presented" (Cohen 9). Thus, the media has chosen to forefront the hypersexual stereotype, rather than presenting all the other aspects of *Gender Queer* and *All Boys Aren't Blue*. This one-sided representation is damaging to the queer community, as it condenses an otherwise many-folded community to simply being inherently hypersexual.

The transmission of the banned books with a focus on them being inherently hypersexual, including terms such as pornographic, causes substantial damage as negative stereotypical portrayals of queer individuals "will be more memorable and meaningful to the viewer than negative portrayals of the heterosexual majority" (Anderson 221). The heterosexual majority constitutes the heteronormative imperative, thus allowing a complex and manifold representation - a privilege not provided for the queer community. Therefore, the media's role must be scrutinized, as it is their chosen perspectives that have real-life consequences. The damage is significant as "people are also more likely to remember schema-consistent information than schema-inconsistent information. In other words, we are more likely to remember things in line with our stereotypes and disregard what we consider exceptions to our schematic rules" (Anderson 221). The media's maintenance of certain stereotypes is therefore harmful, as they hold the opportunity to shape our public perception about minority groups.

This influence is evident in relation to the initiatives for challenging and banning books, as the media accelerates the situation from a local debate to a nationwide concern, favoring certain perspectives over others. The practice of challenging and banning books has been conducted since the 1630s when Thomas Morton's book *New English Canaan* was the first book to be banned in 1637 by the Puritans in the US (Bush). Since then, many books

have been challenged and banned, but in the 1980s, the *Island Trees School vs Pico* court case changed this practice, as the Supreme Court ruled "that school officials cannot ban books solely based on their content" (Bush). Since then, the attention on this practice has further intensified, as it led to several organizations being founded, such as the American Library Association, which maps out the yearly progression of banned books - both in terms of numbers, what kind of literature is targeted and who initiates the challenges and bans.

In recent times, there has been momentum for banning and challenging books in society, as statistics point to an increase in the number of targeted books. In 2019, 607 library materials were targets for challenges and banning, which is an increase of 14% from 2018 (Aucoin 1). This attention has even further intensified, as of 2021 729 books were targeted - an increase of 20% in the span of merely two years (ALA, "Top 10"). This increase in the number of books being challenged and banned indicates that literature has become the new arena for the creation of folk devils and moral panics, with literature focusing on minorities being the primary target.

The sharpened interest in terms of what is being introduced at public schools throughout the US is part of a larger phenomenon that escalated after the murder of George Floyd on May 25th, 2020, where parents started to investigate the material being taught in school, accusing the schools "of trying to 'indoctrinate' (...) children by teaching critical race theory" (Kingkade et. al). It further intensified the attention on literature available at public schools, resulting in an expansion of subjects from critical race theory to themes such as young adult queer literature. This is where the correlation occurs between the increase in the banning of books and queer books such as *Gender Queer* and *All Boys Aren't Blue* being challenged to a degree where they rank first and third place of most challenged books in 2021. The theme queer has, in general, seen a spike in targeting and has gone from ranking at 10th place in the 1990s to a 4th place in the 2010s, hence it has more than doubled from the 1990s. Aucoin elaborates on this, stating that "bans and challenges on LGBTQ+ themes more than doubled from the 1990s and 2000s list to the 2010s list" (11). This indicates that queer literature has become the newest target for conservative parents, organizations, and politicians.

The reason for this fixation can be found in the roots of American history and society. In their article "Implicit Puritanism in American moral cognition" (2010), Eric Uhlmann, T. Poehlman, David Tannenbaum, and John A. Bargh relate the first settlers' religious beliefs - Puritan-Protestants - with American society today. More precisely, Puritan-Protestants seem to have "exerted a sizeable influence over what eventually became the American creed.

Persistently high rates of religiosity, in turn, help explain why contemporary Americans report such surprisingly traditional values regarding work and sexuality" (Uhlmann et. al 313). This traditional view on sexuality saturates the entirety of American society, as "the judgments of contemporary Americans appear to implicitly reflect traditional Protestant-Puritan values regarding sexuality" (Uhlmann et. al 319). As these religious beliefs have been infused into the foundation of US society, people who do not identify as Protestant-Puritan also hold this view on sexuality and hard work. So, even people outside the sphere of religion are subconsciously influenced by this belief system. This suggests why queer literature is a target, as it poses a threat to the foundation on which American society is built. Young adult queer literature displays a more unrestrained relationship with sexuality, which stands in direct opposition to the Protestant-Puritan view on how people should express their sexuality.

The initiatives for banning and challenging literature are part of a larger movement orchestrated by conservative organizations, politicians, and wealthy donors who engage themselves in this as part of a larger conservative campaign seeking to "control or restrict certain ways and means of teaching about American history, LGBTQ+ rights, sex education and related topics" (Skolnik). One of these organizations is Parents Defending Education (PDE), which "describes itself as a 'grassroots organization', but has ties to deep-pocket conservative money and influence" (Gabbatt). Nicole Neily, founder, and President of PDE was previously employed as the executive director of the Independent Women's Forum and worked at the Cato Institute, "a rightwing thinktank co-founded by Republican mega-donor Charles Koch" (Gabbatt). According to *The Guardian*, The Independent Women's Forum received "large donations from Republican donor Leonard Leo, a former vice-president of the Koch-funded Federalist Society", who advised none other than former President Donald Trump on "judicial appointments" (Gabbatt). Because of this, The PDE must be understood in the light of these relations tying it to a deeply conservative environment. Their motives are founded on a pursuit to infuse conservative beliefs by restricting children and teenagers' access to "marginalized voices and perspectives" (Skolnik), as they see it as a threat to America's foundation.

In her book *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women* (1992), Susan Faludi explains the evolution of backlashes in relation to the development of women's rights in the US and how there seems to be a pattern in the movement. A period of progression in women's right is always followed by a backlash, where religious fundamentalists or Right-Winged politicians seeks to revoke women's rights (Faludi 13). According to Faludi, these backlashes can be traced back to colonial times and have since made four revolutions

respectively "in the mid-nineteenth century, the early 1900s, the early 1940s, and the early 1970s" (Faludi 68). Faludi elaborates on the backlashes, as they are also applicable for other movements and how "every backlash movement has had its preferred scapegoat: for the American Protective Association, Catholics filled the bill. For Father Coughlin's 'social justice' movement, Jews. For the Ku Klux Klan, of course, blacks. And for the New Right, a prime enemy would be feminist women" (Faludi 262). When viewing the initiatives for banning and challenging books in this light, it is apparent that banning and challenging literature is the newest form of backlash, as the progressive movement now is gender identity. The so-called grassroots organization represents the religious groups conducting the backlashes and the young adult queer memoirs have occupied the position as the newest scapegoat.

Apart from working on a nationwide level, PDE also offers guides on how parents can involve themselves in the movement, offering templates for creating "a web of coordinated Instagram pages that highlight perceived liberal bias at specific schools and offers a step-by-step guide to doing the same, from how to create a specific email address to match the mission to how to describe the Instagram account" (Gabbatt). By creating these guides, the PDE eases accessibility for parents to get involved in the movement. When involved, they seek out additional influence by offering a guide for how parents can get involved in school boards, which is "an often ignored position that wields a considerable amount of power" (Gabbatt), thus placing themselves and their belief in power positions throughout the country. Faludi traces a pattern in who instigates a backlash and how they came to be influential. In the 70s, evangelic Right-Wingers conducted a round of backlash against women's rights, and "by the early 1980s the fundamentalist ideology has shouldered its way into government", which culminated in the mid-eighties "as resistance to women's rights acquired political and social acceptability, it passed into the popular culture" (Faludi 13). This should be viewed as a foreshadowing of the coming development. If parents, who are members of organizations such as PDE, are appointed a seat on school boards throughout the US, the consequences will be far-reaching and will possibly result in a withdrawal of queer civil rights altogether.

Organizations such as Moms for Liberty purport to be a nonprofit grassroots organization with "70-000 member [...] with 165 chapters throughout the country. The group is operated by Tina Descovich and Tiffany Justice, two former school board members" (Skolnik). According to Adam Gabbatt, institutions such as Moms for Liberty claim:

> To be 'grassroots' efforts and have frequently led the charge, petitioning school
> boards or elected officials to remove certain books. Though some of these

organizations present themselves as a local effort that sprang up around groups of parents united behind a cause, many of the groups involved in banning books are in fact linked, and backed by influential conservative donors.

This involvement has elevated the conflict from a local disagreement into a nationwide concern - thus resulting in a moral panic, where simplified depictions fill the media coverage with a focus on a narrow aspect of the queer community. They have taken it a step further, as they have professionalized the process of challenging books by providing "detailed walkthroughs for parents about how to file open records requests, create press releases, file civil rights complaints, and petition school boards", thus making it into a political battlefield where their main goal is to "eradicate what they see as Left-Wing ideology from public schools" (Skolnik). It is the concerned parents who orchestrate the movement in each county but are supported by a professional organization that wishes to use the parents as a smokescreen to appear less institutionalized. According to Faludi, this strategy is more destructive than an organized movement, as "the lack of orchestration, the absence of a single string-puller, only makes it harder to see - and perhaps more effective" (16). Operationalizing this strategy makes it harder for the counter-movement to identify the instigators and thereby counter the overall movement. The parents become the public symbol of the movement, but the real instigators are the so-called grassroots organizations operated by the deep-pocketed powerful conservatives.

The mass media framed this phenomenon as largely driven by local grassroots movements, but during the escalation, several other media outlets have investigated these organizations more closely. Moms for Liberty defines themselves as "nonpartisan, but grounded in 'conservative values'" (Anderson). It was however discovered that Moms for Liberty was co-founded and co-directed by Bridget Ziegler, who is married to Christian Ziegler, the vice-chairman of the Florida Republican Party, and that Moms for Liberty's group's director of development, Marie Rogerson, "formerly worked for Republican state Rep. Randy Fine" (Skolnik) as a campaign consultant. Representative Randy Fire has been a "central figure in Florida Republicans' crusade against 'critical race theory'" (Skolnik).

In 2021, parents accounted for 39% of the initiatives for challenging books and are by far the largest group (ALA, "Who Initiates"). Political and religious groups account for 10% - thus the two combined represent almost half of all challenges initiated in the last year (ALA, "Who Initiates"). By collaborating with the parents, advocacy groups can use them as a cover for the real motivation behind their movements and less as a politically professionalized organization. Behind these so-called grassroots groups are "conservative donors, who appear

to be driving the book-banning effort" (Gabbatt). The interests of the organizations are beyond that of the school curriculum and are founded on a deep-rooted conservative agenda for censoring subjects such as racism and LGBTQ+, passing "bills barring educators from teaching about racism in the classroom, and many parents and school boards in these states are doubling down on removing books that tell the stories of LGBTQ people and communities of color from local and school libraries" (Bellamy-Walker). The motivation derives from their Protestant-Puritan convictions, which are deeply intertwined with the creation of US society and this resistance to alternative ways of conducting sexuality should be perceived in this light.

Considering the connection between the organizations, deep-pocket conservatives, and the religious foundation on which US society saturates their motives for banning and challenging books, a need for understanding how these books pose a threat to society emerges. Jack Halberstam outlines an explanation as to why conservatives and deeply-religious people might find the queer community a threat, and in his book, he introduces the notion of queer temporality. Queer temporality can be defined as temporalities that lie outside the logic of the heteronormative life cycle, e.g., birth, marriage, reproduction, labor, and death (Halberstam 14). The queer temporality originated out of two separate needs. First are the queer individuals, who wish not to enter the heteronormative value system. The second is restricted access to fundamental things in the heteronormative society - e.g., the right to marriage or adoption. This temporality stands in direct opposition to the heteronormative lifecycle, which is focused on institutions such as "family, heterosexuality and reproduction" (Halberstam 12). The main goal of one's existence is directed at reproduction and settling into the capitalist way of life, thus devoting one's time to work.

Gender Queer and *All Boys Aren't Blue* represent the queer temporality, and when allowed in the public sphere it creates the possibility for all individuals "to believe that their futures can be imagined according to logics that lie outside of those paradigmatic markers of life experience— namely, birth, marriage, reproduction, and death" (Halberstam 14). Consequently, a different path emerges, one that lies outside of the "temporal frames of bourgeois reproduction and family, longevity, risk/safety and inheritance" (Halberstam 20). Ergo, queer temporality presents the opportunity for an alternative course of life for all individuals - queer or not. It creates the opportunity that "all kinds of people, especially in postmodernity, will and do opt to live outside of reproductive and familial time as well as on the edges of logics of labor and production" (Halberstam 26).

One of Halberstam's central assertions has been that "queer temporality disrupts the normative narratives of time that form the base of nearly every definition of the human in almost all of our modes of understanding, from the professions of psychoanalysis and medicine, to socioeconomic and demographic studies on which every sort of state policy is based, to our understandings of the affective and the aesthetic" (266). This is at the core of why young adult queer literature is being targeted for challenging and banning - it disrupts the Protestant-Puritan belief about American society, which serves as the foundation for the nation. Queer literature tampers with the fixated societal norms that constitute the foundation on which American society stands, which explains the conservative organizations and politicians' obsession with restraining access.

Conclusion

The surge of book challenges and bans has risen through the last years, especially targeting queer young adult literature. Through the analysis and discussion of the two queer memoirs *Gender Queer* and *All Boys Aren't Blue*, several aspects became apparent when investigating the reasoning for the targeting of this specific segment, as well as the surge of this movement. By the implementation of respectively Butler, Dyer, Cohen, Kearns, Lanser, Kress and van Leeuwen, and Machin and Mayr, it is evident that there is a discrepancy between the focus of the media and the actual intention of the memoirs' authors.

Throughout the investigation of the articles published by the *New York Post*, *CNN*, *TIME*, and *Chicago Tribune* it became apparent that the articles favor a certain discourse surrounding the book banning movement. This is primarily achieved by including a variety of sources that emphasize the books as being inherently hypersexual. The authors of the articles have primarily adopted a neutral representation with a focus on the speakers' honorific status to heighten the credibility of individuals on each side of the movement - thus leaving the responsibility for the overall interpretation with the reader. As stereotypes are inherently more memorable to the reader, the neutral representation ends up favoring the message of the pro-banning movement, which inevitably results in a negative portrayal of the queer community.

Both memoirs employ narratological tools that enhance the ambiance of privacy between narrator and reader. By using an openly queer homodiegetic narrator, both memoirs become relatable to the reader, as the reader can draw a direct connection between the presented narrative and the actual author of the book. It is also this narratological aspect that accentuates their exposure in the book banning debate, as the reader can directly connect the

sexually explicit content to an actual person. In doing so, the reader may feel like they are intruding into a private sphere and in a conservative context, this sensation is shocking, as the scenes in both books display queer sexuality, which is a break from the heteronormative imperative dominating contemporary society.

In *Gender Queer*, Kobabe uses graphic elements to enhance how exploring and questioning one's gender and sexuality is a continuous, diverse, and complicated process. By including sexual scenes that convey consent and exploration, the reader is exposed to a narrative wherein queer gender identity and sexuality are complex dimensions that cannot be perceived as definite. Moreover, Johnson's *All Boys Aren't Blue* is a representative guide for navigating the difficulties of being a queer person of color in America. In the chapters that solely focus on the various aspects of sex and sexuality, Johnson manages to create an educational safe space wherein young queer readers can reflect upon Johnson's own experiences with sex and sexuality, using this platform to learn more about queer sexuality - a valuable tool that Johnson themselves were not subjected to in their adolescent years.

Where the media solely focuses on the sexual components, disseminating how the pro-banning movement believes these aspects of the memoirs to be harmful, the memoirs instead focus on queer representation. Here, sex and sexuality are vital aspects of the overall representation of the books, yet not the paramount focus for the overall interpretation and intention. Instead, this focus is on the complex nature of queer gender identity that young adult people might explore in their formative years. Consequently, both memoirs incorporate sexual content to provide the reader with a nuanced perspective on queer gender identity and sexuality.

Lastly, it was discovered that there is a connection between the current surge in book challenges fronted by the pro-banning movement and the conservative values that US society is built upon, namely the Puritan-Protestant. The books being challenged are a representation of alternate queer temporalities that break with the heteronormative imperative deeply ingrained in cultural and social settings, and this representation is a direct threat to the grassroots organizations founded by deep-pocketed conservative power players. The result is an organized targeting of queer literature in terms of banning and challenging, as they directly challenge the very foundation of Americans' self-understanding.

Even though the analysis and discussion demonstrate news coverage that portrays the challenged and banned books as wrongfully targeted for their sexual content, it should be noted that this analysis covers a small qualitative - but thoroughly analyzed - dataset with four articles from four different news outlets, as well as two challenged books. This should

then be considered a glimpse into the way the news outlets choose to convey the current book banning debate, thus only providing a narrow insight into a tremendous and continuously evolving movement.

Conclusively, it is apparent that there is an incongruity between the narrative purpose of the two chosen memoirs and the media's hyper fixation with the sexual aspects of the books. Multiple US media outlets focus primarily on the sexual components of the books, highlighting these aspects as the most prominent feature, but the memoirs only incorporate sexual scenes to further their main point - namely, to create a narrative representational space for young queer readers. By emphasizing sex as the main objective of the books, the media is conveying a harmful stereotype about being queer, and this negatively affects the queer community. The book banning debate is still ongoing, where powerful public institutions continuously target queer literature for their representative qualities, condoning their ability to present readers with an alternate temporality aside from the heteronormative imperative, in an attempt to restrict the accessibility to identifiable representation. Censorship is restricting, and in the case of the ongoing book banning debate, directly damaging for the young people of America.

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