

1-30-2017

Exploring Diversity, Citizenship, and Gender through Jazz: A Narrative Criticism of *I am Jazz*

Mary Beth Jones
Linfield College

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.linfield.edu/nwca>

 Part of the [Early Childhood Education Commons](#), [Gender, Race, Sexuality, and Ethnicity in Communication Commons](#), [Language and Literacy Education Commons](#), [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Studies Commons](#), [Publishing Commons](#), and the [Speech and Rhetorical Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Jones, Mary Beth, "Exploring Diversity, Citizenship, and Gender through Jazz: A Narrative Criticism of *I am Jazz*" (2017). *Northwest Communication Association Conference Papers & Presentations*. Paper. Submission 2.
<http://digitalcommons.linfield.edu/nwca/2>

This Paper is brought to you for free via open access, courtesy of DigitalCommons@Linfield. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@linfield.edu.

Exploring Diversity, Citizenship, and Gender through Jazz:
A Narrative Criticism of *I am Jazz*

by
Mary Beth Jones

Linfield College
Communication Arts Program
McMinnville, Oregon 97128

Submitted to the
Northwest Communication Association Annual Conference
January 30, 2017

Abstract

In this study, a narrative analysis of a children's picture book was conducted to uncover how young audiences are taught about diversity and inclusion through books. The setting, characters, narrator, and target audiences of the 2014 book *I am Jazz* were evaluated to decipher how readers are educated about transgenderism and diversity in greater context. Specific rhetorical qualities in the visual and written elements emphasize the importance of diversity, uniqueness, individuality, and acceptance. This particular book has created a range of support and protest since its publication, and it is an important example of the emotional and political power of a story. An awareness of the messages and images sent to young learners is a critical part of fostering inclusivity and creating global citizens.

Keywords:

narrative criticism

children's literature

picture books

transgenderism

global citizenship

Anyone can rattle off the titles of their most beloved childhood books, recall favorite characters, and recount the plots. Cultural, historical, and familial stories are told, re-told, memorized, and acted out. These stories create a natural gateway for cultures to embed beliefs and values, educate audiences, and preserve ideals. Cautionary tales, instructive stories, and accounts of honorable behavior exist in every culture; fables and fairytales leak across nations and are personalized by different cultures' identities. There is a wealth of history and lessons passed down through stories, and it is important to realize the great influence these tales have on readers and listeners alike.

For children around the globe, storytelling is often the first way of learning the values of their community; the first books a child is exposed to creates a basis for learning, imagination, and self-identity. Parents are encouraged to read to their children from birth, and in school, literacy programs are a core part of curriculums. The impact and importance of early childhood literature paves the way for communication studies regarding their effects.

Today, as children grow up in an impressively multicultural world, the need for accepting, open-minded, and inclusive leaders and citizens is greater than ever. Examining the messages of children's books reveals what young learners are being taught and how they are encouraged to live and appreciate the diverse world they live in. This study will analyze rhetorical devices in a children's book and consider how they function to create accepting and mindful readers. The purpose of this study is to identify ways in which young global citizens are being influenced and taught about the world around them.

This study will examine a children's book called *I am Jazz* by Jessica Herthel and Jazz Jennings, illustrated by Shelagh McNicholas. Published in 2014, *I am Jazz* introduces, defines, and creates a gateway for discussing ideas of transgenderism. An analysis of *I am Jazz* using

Walter Fisher's narrative criticism will reveal how children are taught through books to be accepting members of diverse cultures. This study will observe the themes and style of the book's setting, characters, narrator, and audience to gain an understanding of their functions to educate readers. The hopes of this research are to identify ways in which children and adults are taught through literature about citizenship, diversity, and inclusion.

I am Jazz begins with an introduction of Jazz and a description of her favorite things: "dancing, singing, back flips, drawing, soccer, swimming, makeup, and pretending I'm a pop star" (Herthel 2). Describing these very basic and typical childhood activities, Jazz relates to audiences who also enjoy or have experienced them. The corresponding illustrations show Jazz participating in these actions wearing pink, with long hair, and playing with friends. For all intent and purpose, Jazz looks like a little girl. However, when Jazz introduces her friends, she explains, "But, I'm not exactly like Samantha and Casey" (Herthel 5). The following page shows several children's drawings. In each drawing a child, presumably Jazz, is frowning or under rain clouds or crying. The drawings flow into the neighboring page which shows Jazz drawing a happier picture of herself as a mermaid. Her pictures speak louder than words: Jazz is unhappy and confused with herself as a person.

As the story continues, Jazz recalls how her family thought she was an odd child, not wanting to be called a boy and not playing the way her brothers did. Jazz is seen in various outfits and consistently looks happier in pink dresses and tutus than in the "boy clothes" her parents make her wear in public. However, Jazz emphasizes her persistence and commitment to herself when she states, "Still, I never gave up trying to convince them. Pretending I was a boy felt like telling a lie" (Herthel 13). This simple and powerful message is relatable to most

children who have been discouraged from telling lies and who know the guilt associated with untruthfulness.

Everything changes for Jazz when a doctor introduces her to the term “transgender.” At once Jazz is understood and supported by her parents and they work to create a world that accepts her as a girl called Jazz. Jazz explains her identity in very simple and clear terms, stating early in the book, “I have a girl brain but a boy body. This is called transgender. I was born this way!” (Herthel 7). This language makes the term and definition accessible to children and doesn’t attempt to shield readers from the correct terminology. As Jazz explains herself to teachers and peers, she struggles with the right to use the girls’ bathroom and play on the girls’ sports teams. Jazz embraces the emotional difficulties that came with the process but finishes her story, telling readers: “I don’t mind being different. Different is special! I think what matters most is what a person is like inside. And inside, I am happy. I am having fun. I am proud! I am Jazz!” (Herthel 22).

After the narrative ends, there are three real-life photos of Jazz: one looking like a young boy with short hair, one of her at the same age with longer hair, and a more current photo of her swimming with long flowing hair and a mermaid tail. Each photo is framed, and there is an implied progression of personal growth and development. There is an explanation of TransKids Purple Rainbow Foundation which is an organization supporting transgender youths that Jazz co-founded. The call to action is clear and direct: “Families need to support their children and allow them to grow up free of gender roles” (Herthel 23). This reveals some of the background and reasoning for the authors’ work.

Examining *I am Jazz* as a narrative with influence over readers will reveal some of the visual and textual rhetoric Herthel and Jennings use to communicate messages of diversity.

Children's books are not a new area of study. Educators, parents, and authors have all expressed opinions on methods to integrate positive literature into curriculums, and a growing area of study is the effects of books on young children. A study that measured growth in "sensitivity and global attitudes" found that literature had a great effect on those variables (Salisbury 35). As Salisbury found, after fourth-graders were exposed to "globally significant" literature, their understanding and appreciation for global awareness increased dramatically (35). Another study examined the outcomes of teaching children about bullying. Freeman found that after engaging with a class of six-year-olds through storytelling and acting out bullying behaviors, children had a greater understanding of the concept and its effects on others (311). These are just two examples that lead researchers to accept that children's books have an effect greater than entertainment.

Literature Review

The study of *I am Jazz* draws from previous research in the veins of teaching citizenship, books as instruction, and the relation between books and teaching citizenship. Educators, parents, authors, and communication researchers have studied the profound effect of books used in curriculums. Manners, teamwork, inside voices, and polite habits are often emphasized in day-to-day preschool and elementary classrooms. However, larger and less tangible lessons such as citizenship, acceptance of other cultures, and open-mindedness are more difficult to teach and assess.

In the legal sense, citizenship is a "social status" which influences global economics, cultural identity, and social responsibility (Larkins 8). However, for the purpose of this research, the notion of global citizenship is far more broad. According to Bradberry, "Global Citizenship is about understanding the need to tackle injustice and inequality, and have the desire and ability to

work actively to do so” (2). Oxfam continues to specify education for global citizenship as the development of “core competencies which allow them (the students) to actively engage with the world” (“Global”).

The complexity of this phenomenon creates difficulties for educators who wish to foster globally-minded students. In her study, Larkins coded conversations about citizenship from Welsh and French children. Larkins found that commonly discussed themes were: “contributing, influencing, making safe, communicating, caring, doing education, playing/association, creating self/space and (mis)behaving” (13). These findings emphasized that children do have the capacity to communicate complex thoughts and hold opinions regarding abstract ideas.

In the classroom, teachers have a responsibility to engage with students to help them develop the competencies Oxfam alluded to. In a study evaluating 200 teachers in the UK, researchers discovered that educators skirted around more complex issues such as global economic injustices. However, they emphasized the aspects of citizenship that highlight interpersonal skills, racism, sexism, and environmental issues (Davies, 14). Researchers concluded that the structure and approach of global citizenship education needed to be refocused (Davies 15).

The U.S. Department of Education defines another concept that is closely related to citizenship. “Character education is a learning process that enables students and adults in a school community to understand, care about and act on core ethical values such as respect, justice, civic virtue and citizenship, and responsibility for self and others” (“Character”). Character education is an important facet of global citizenship because it emphasizes the individual qualities needed to gain an appreciation for diverse multicultural societies. In her study, Almerico brought the notions of character and citizenship together, acknowledging that

character education often leads to “being a good person and responsible citizen” (2).

Incorporating literature with exemplary characters, clear themes, and intriguing storylines, books have the power to shape the character of its readers (Almerico 3).

Children’s picture books are, at their basic level, stories enhanced with pictures intended for a young audience. Often, they feature children as characters and describe scenarios that most children can relate to. Author and researcher, Gopalakrishnan stressed that “the most important point that distinguishes children’s literature from other types of literature is that it *validates* all children’s experiences” (5). This notion of validation is crucial when educating young learners through books because there must be a sense of truthfulness and realism in order for the messages to be meaningful.

Previous research suggests that one of the great values of multicultural literature is its discussion and exemplification of diversity. The importance of multicultural literature in general is such that “it gives equal representation and validation to countless voices that had either been silenced or did not have an opportunity to see themselves aptly represented in literature” (Gopalakrishnan 34). One study analyzed the effects of books featuring characters with disabilities. The books that respectfully and accurately described characters with disabilities saw students’ growth in tolerance and inclusivity as noted through surveys (Lintner 202). A study examining the growth of fourth graders’ global attitudes through interactions with multicultural texts found that students’ global awareness increased significantly as shown through conversations and surveys (Salisbury 128). This study provided statistical evidence supporting the relationship between multicultural literature and individual citizenship growth.

Another study coded children’s books through the lens of the United Nations’ Ten Rights of the Child. Researchers examined books that won the Batchelder award, which is given to

children's books originally printed in a foreign country, in a language other than English (Garrison et al. 74). The researchers reported that the books studied provided readers with understanding, insight, and connections with communities around the world (88). This emphasizes the notion that multicultural and international books have great value and potential to create and affirm global awareness.

The power of literature, however, can be used to reinforce undesired concepts. Marshall emphasized this potential through a study of books describing societal gender roles (260). Focusing on *Little Red Riding Hood*, Marshall highlighted the cautionary appeal of the story in contrast with the culturally assigned gender roles and stereotypes it emphasizes. Marshall proved how female sexuality presented in this fairy tale has negative undertones for young readers (268). In conjunction with Gopalakrishnan's definitions of children's literature, impacting young audiences is more effective when the literature confirms actual, lived experiences. Drawing upon realistic circumstances adds a truthfulness and validity to the experiences in the book.

Other forms of mediated messages communicate lessons of social and emotional intelligence. A study of a children's television show, *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood* found that the prosocial program paired with parental conversation and "active meditation" highly impacted the children's social and emotional skills (Rasmussen et al 456). Rasmussen and other researchers found that when parents discussed the prosocial show with their children, the results of emotional and social intelligence were greatly increased: "When children perceive media content to be important, they are motivated to learn from the content, elaborate more on the content, and are thus more likely to be affected by the content" (454). This observation confirms the impressionability of children to mediated lessons and also emphasizes the relationship between perceived importance of the text and the impact of the text's messages.

As seen in these previous studies, children's books have the power to address a wide array of issues in a meaningful way, and student comprehension of these issues is measurable. The research emphasizes an age-long belief: books have a profound impact on readers and learners. The broad goal of achieving global citizenship in young students through books has great potential. Children's picture books have the power to expose educators and learners to societal dilemmas and cultural differences in a unique and effective way (Bradberry 3). Using books rather than television or classroom lessons, children personally experience and interpret messages (Bradberry 3). Although definitions of citizenship and character development are abstract and vague, previous research has found that children have the ability to discuss, appreciate, and learn from citizenship education.

This study of *I am Jazz* will address the following research questions: What rhetorical devices are used to define and explain "global citizenship"? How are young readers taught the value of diversity and inclusion? How can picture books be used to foster development of acceptance?

Method

Walter Fisher was one of the first to publish work validating the importance between storytelling and the human experience. According to Fisher,

The idea of human beings as storytellers indicates the generic form of all symbol composition; it holds that symbols are created and communicated ultimately as stories meant to give order to human experience and to introduce others to dwell in them to establish ways of living in common, in communities in which there is sanction for the story that constitutes one's life. (Fisher, "Narration" 4)

As the quotation above suggests, Fisher believed in storytelling as a main source of human communication. Fisher coined the term “homo narrans” as a “master metaphor” for human existence through stories, suggesting that humans instinctively narrate experiences (“Narration” 4). Fisher claimed that for humans as “storytelling animals,” teaching and communicating through stories it is an integral part of human nature (“Narration” 2). Fisher challenges Aristotle’s “rational world paradigm” as the only source of truth and validity, suggesting that logic “could be achieved through ‘all sorts of symbolic action,’ most notably through narrative” (Clair et al 3). Fisher searched for meaning and truth in a variety of forms, and most effectively found it through stories.

Through theorizing about narratives, Fisher created a paradigm. In his 1984 article “Narration as a Human Communication Paradigm: The Case of Public Moral Argument,” Fisher introduces his philosophy as “a dialectical synthesis of two traditional strands in the history of rhetoric: the argumentative, persuasive theme and the literary, aesthetic theme” (2). Fisher defines “paradigm” as a method to validate and explore the workings of the human communication experience (“Narration” 2). His narrative paradigm, therefore, is an effort to unite fact and style to create vivid and reliable communication through story. Fisher’s ideas are seen throughout history and in a variety of cultural practices. From fables to poems to classic literature, historically, humans have relied on stories for creating culture and reinforcing beliefs. Fisher draws on this historical context to reinforce his ideas that storytelling is a validating and important communication device.

Fisher’s theory on narrative has since been used to establish a method to study rhetoric. The method, called narrative criticism, uses the foundational concept of narration as communication to identify narrative qualities in rhetoric and examine how they function to serve

greater purposes. According to Sonja Foss, narrative criticism is done in three steps. The first is to select an appropriate artifact which involves at least two events in a sequence (Foss 308). Suitable narratives also must contain a causal relationship rather than isolated instances. The final element of a viable narrative is the focus on one subject (Foss 308). Once an appropriate narrative has been identified, its context is analyzed.

Researchers analyze the artifact by identifying the objective and the features of the narrative, using those elements to assess the efficacy of the narrative as a communication device (Foss 310). To evaluate the effect, researchers consider the setting, characters, narrator, events, time, cause and effect, audience, theme, and type of narration (Foss 314). These features are examined through the lens of the overall objective of the narrative. Research assesses the importance of the objective and if it was achieved through the elements of the narrative (Foss 315). Selecting a research question stems from the previous identification and assessment. The question should specify one significant element of the narrative: “the objective of the narrative, the nature of strategies that accomplish particular objectives, or the appropriateness of a narrative objective” (Foss 316).

The narrative criticism method has been used over time to examine a variety of artifacts. Previous research using narrative criticism has focused on books, television shows, movies, as well as less obvious forms of storytelling such as speeches and advertisements. As Fisher asserted in his original writings, humans instinctively create communities and share experiences through storytelling (“Narration” 4). The vast applicability of the narrative criticism is interesting for critics because it opens doors for analysis of a variety of artifacts that engage audiences in unique ways.

Some analysis focuses on literary stories. Jennifer Wood examined a book called *The Measure of our Success: A Letter to My Children* to study the effects of parental tone and “motherly nag” to emphasize the parenting goals of Edelman (Wood 107). Wood focused on Fisher’s concept of “narrative rationality” to assess the validity of stories to gauge how audiences react based on the narratives (107). Wood chose the narrative theory because in accordance with Fisher’s theory, “parental narratives work as a communication tool to create interpretive contexts for social actions, especially those concerning children” (108). Wood focused on the rhetorical devices and structure used by Edelman to gain credibility as a narrator. In another study, Eaves and Savoie applied Fisher’s theory to the reality television show, *Big Brother*. Researchers questioned the acceptability and validity of *Big Brother* in the framing of its narrative. Researchers concluded that this show is a great example of the narrative paradigm because it “unites viewers” and invites them into the reality of *Big Brother* (96).

To gain insight on cultural impacts of narratives, Young used Fisher’s paradigm to examine how narratives are used to create identity. Young studied a 1997 internal conflict of the Cherokee Nation protesting their Chief, Joe Byrd, who had violated constitutional and tribal laws. Young examined the rallies and Byrd’s speeches that followed, and noted how the narratives of the protests redefined the Cherokee culture (132). Young highlighted the importance of discussion that encouraged the nation to reevaluate “their sense of communal life” (138). Young used Fisher’s theory to study culture, history, and temporal relations through internal conflict. In a different form of cultural identity communication, Atkinson applied Fisher’s theory to a series of advertisements revealing corruption in the corporate world. Atkinson studied resistance art as narratives and how their messages contributed to “culture,

experience, and community of the anti-corporate movement” (165). These narratives in turn, communicated ideas of fiscal irresponsibility and encouraged defiance of corporations.

Caldiero applied Fisher’s theory to news publications during times of crisis, examining how reporters frame crisis events as narratives. Researchers found that the different types of narratives (individual and collective, scapegoating, prevention, imagined futures, reflection) were used to gain specific effects during crisis coverage (Caldiero 7). Caldiero noted the methods of narration influenced their impact on viewers.

As seen from previous works using narrative criticism, there is opportunity to discover the impacts of narration through various sources and mediums. An application of Fisher’s theory to the book *I am Jazz* will help uncover how Herthel and Jennings describe the phenomenon of transgenderism and in turn encourage audiences to embrace diversity. The examination of the picture book through the lens of storytelling and narration will highlight how complex phenomena can be explained through personal narration. Because the book is not only a story, but an autobiography, the narrative paradigm will be important to gain an understanding of how Jennings uses her personal experiences to create a reality that readers can relate to and appreciate.

Analysis

At first glance, *I am Jazz* is a cute book for children. It’s wide, hardcover frame, water color illustrations, and sparse sentences give it the look of a classic children’s book. However, *I am Jazz* is an incredibly modern and forward-thinking book using rhetorical strategies to change societal opinions and perceptions of gender.

I am Jazz addresses issues of diversity and acceptance through the lens of gender identity. While a main goal of the narrative is to encourage families to not impress gender roles on children and to accept individuality, it also emphasizes the importance of self-acceptance and appreciation for diversity. Through the simple and straightforward language and clear illustrations, *I am Jazz* intends to educate audiences to normalize and create widespread support of gender dysphoria. Using Fisher's narrative criticism and Foss' suggested application, this analysis will examine the setting, characters, narrator, and audience to assess how Herthel and Jennings' goals are achieved through their narrative.

Setting

Jazz's story takes place in a variety of common, everyday locations: at home, school, the park, a doctor's office. These ordinary places are shared by everyone in one aspect or another. This creates an immediate connection between readers and the narrative. Because most children experience school and home life, they have a context for a playground, their classroom, and home. For audiences to connect and engage with Jazz as a character, it is important to create some common ground between the reader and narrator. Crafting this story in neutral and everyday places, Herthel and Jennings highlight the universality of the events and create a foundation for understanding. This not only attempts to relate to readers, but emphasizes that Jazz's story and experience could be a reality for any classmate, peer, or teammate.

Character

Characters are seen in and out of the story as they relate and react to Jazz's self-discovery. They provide opportunities to teach readers how to appropriately accept Jazz as she is. Major characters in the book include Jazz's family and friends. Jazz's family was supportive

even though they didn't understand what was happening at first. Jazz is contrasted with her siblings who demonstrate stereotypical cisgender behavior: her brothers are illustrated playing basketball while Jazz dances in a tutu; her sister is shown brushing her hair, watching Jazz twirl in a pink dress. In both illustrations, Jazz is in the foreground of the page while her siblings look on from the background. In each portrayal, Jazz's siblings are illustrated with bemused but unjudgmental expressions. As Jazz is in the foreground being watched by other characters, the visual aspects of the book encourage identification with and attention on Jazz. Despite her obvious impact as the narrator, Jazz asserts her presence and importance as the visual focus. Jazz's parents are also important characters. In illustrations, they are always shown on the same plane as Jazz, holding her hands in the park, arm around her at the doctor's office, or hugging her at home telling her, "We love you no matter what" (Herthel 15). Jazz's family, particularly her parents, provide examples of positive reactions to addressing transgenderism within the family. The close and equal proximity of this parent-child relationship visually emphasizes the importance of unconditional love and support.

Jazz's friends also display important responses. When Jazz introduces her two best friends, Samantha and Casey, they are seen playing all together: dancing and cartwheeling as a group. However, when Jazz distinguishes herself from Samantha and Casey, they are in the background, looking at Jazz with smiles on their faces. This is later contrasted with three other kids "who tease me or call me boy names, or ignore me altogether" (Herthel 21). The corresponding illustration shows the three bullies looking at Jazz who is crossing her arms while the other kids are in the background laughing and apparently yelling to her. Jazz, in the foreground, has a thought bubble with herself and a friend hugging. The image of the joyful embrace is larger than the bullies in the background and is on the left side of the page, which

draws initial attention. This indicates that Jazz places high value on her friends who accept her and want to get to know her; the importance of kind peers is evident as Jazz works to overcome negative feedback. It is also another visual reinforcement of positive reactions.

Herthel and Jennings provide readers with characters who exemplify a variety of reactions to transgenderism. Jazz describes how supportive her family was and how accepting her friends were once she could call herself transgender. However, Jazz acknowledges that the unkind behavior “makes me feel crummy” (Herthel 21). Herthel and Jennings give readers this alternative reaction to transgenderism, but they are sure to include how that language and behavior is hurtful. The variety of reactions also contributes to the validity of the narrative because of the unashamed honesty of both negative and positive responses. Through the visual positioning of the various characters, Jazz is always seen in the foreground which emphasizes her validity as a narrator and adds emotional connection for readers.

Narrator

As the narrator of her own story, readers have the opportunity to fully engage in Jazz’s journey of self-acceptance. With each new event in her life, Jazz makes her emotions clear. When Jazz’s parents dressed her in “boy clothes,” she feels mad. When she was later allowed to play on the girls’ soccer team at school, she feels happy. Describing these emotions allows readers to more clearly understand the complexity of the situation and provides accessible terms to relate to Jazz. Using simple and common feelings such as mad, sad, and happy, readers understand that Jazz experiences these universal emotions, regardless of her gender. It also specifically calls to audiences who have experience with these common emotions. The first-person perspective gives readers insight to Jazz’s life in an intimate way. This is especially

effective for young readers because the explicit emotional descriptors provide children grounds to relate to a comprehensible vocabulary.

As a narrator, Jazz is positive and open. This creates a connection between reader and narrator because there is a level of trust and accuracy that comes with her transparent narration style. Jazz's narration style allows readers to get to know her personality and appreciate her spunk: "As I got a little older, I hardly ever played with trucks or tools or superheros. Only princesses and mermaid costumes. My brothers told me this was girls stuff. I kept right on playing" (Herthel 10). One of Jazz's most notable features as a storyteller is her commitment to herself and her emotions. In the quotation describing the disconnect between herself and her brothers, Jazz emphasizes that she felt different from her siblings but wasn't going to stop being herself. Through her simple vocabulary and references to common childhood activities, Jazz paints an unashamed and accurate self-portrait. This tone and accessibility as a narrator adds to her validity and trustworthiness.

Audience

Based on the structure and visual aspects of the book, *I am Jazz* appeals to children as a story to teach about transgenderism. The simple sentences and pretty watercolors appeal to pre-school aged children. However, due to the educational nature and levels of advocacy, parents and teachers are also targeted to learn how to talk about and deal with issues of gender identity. The two audiences come with two techniques. *I am Jazz* appeals to children through the descriptions of "normal" childhood activities and simple language, and it appeals to parents because it provides a framework for discussion and opens the door to continue encouraging young readers to actively think about acceptance. For instance, Jazz's definition of transgender fulfills both

audience targets: “I have a girl brain but a boy body. This is called transgender. I was born this way!” (Herthel 7).

One key moment is found in a conversation between Jazz and her mother: “Mom said that being Jazz would make me different from the other kids at school, but that being different is okay. What’s important, she said, is that I’m happy with being who I am” (Herthel 16). In this moment, Jazz acknowledges future difficulties and societal backlash, but combats the potential oppression with self-appreciation. Jazz does not shield readers from examples of discrimination: “At the beginning of the year they wanted me to use the boy’s bathroom, and play on the boys’ team in gym class, but that didn’t feel normal to me at ALL” (Herthel 18). Jazz doesn’t attempt to sugarcoat the transition, but always stays true to herself and takes readers through her experiences. Through simple yet effective narration, Jennings makes her journey accessible to readers of all ages and effectively engages with audiences to gain their support and sympathy.

The various rhetorical elements of *I am Jazz* help to fulfill Herthel and Jennings’ broader goals. The setting, character, narrator, and audience weave an educational web to introduce children and parents to ideas of gender that challenge societal norms. Framing Jazz as a normal child struggling to find acceptance is a powerful choice because it connects with young audiences in a unique way, adding levels of innocence and rawness to its emotion. The powerful lessons of diversity and inclusion are more influential in the book because the gap between readers and Jazz is diminished. Reducing the extraordinary or unique elements of Jazz’s story to a general appreciation for being “different,” children exposed to *I am Jazz* will recognize the value of accepting people as they are. Parents also have an obligation when engaging with this book to converse and discuss the implications of the story with their young readers.

I am Jazz utilizes rhetorical devices such as illustrations, simple vocabulary, and commonplace identifiers to engage with audiences about citizenship. Through strategic placement of characters in the illustrations, Jazz emphasizes the importance of respect and acceptance of people who may be considered different. The large themes and goals of education and valuing diversity are seen throughout the narrative and are finally explicitly explained when Jazz chooses to end her story with a call to appreciate differences: “I don’t mind being different. Different is special! I think what matters most is what a person is like inside” (Herthel 21). This conclusion reminds readers to look beyond external identities. Although *I am Jazz* specifically addresses the phenomena of transgenderism, the message of appreciating all sorts of differences is prominent.

Fisher’s method works well as a frame for analyzing *I am Jazz* because it acknowledges the impact and importance of Jazz’s story. Because of the personal nature of the plot and the open, optimistic tone of the narration, it is fitting to look at this book through the lens of narration and validity. Jazz, the narrator and main character, shares intimate details of her life in a very simple and honest style that helps emphasize the truth and of her words and emotions. As mentioned in previous research, the importance of multicultural literature is to validate experiences. While Jazz realizes and explains her personal experience, she validates those who have also struggled with feelings of displacement, lack of self-appreciation, and exclusion.

In today’s society, the personal and intimate subject of diversity and citizenship is public, and even political. Through the use of a narrative to prod the discussion of diversity and acceptance, the politically and emotionally charged reactions are diminished because of the innocent and validating nature of the artifact. *I am Jazz* bravely opens the door for discussion about transgenderism and welcomes readers to think about diversity and inclusion in all forms.

Through the illustrations and simple text, the complexity and layers of the phenomenon are addressed and explained. The unapologetic and direct tone contribute to the efforts to normalize and simplify the issue without losing the highly powerful emotional dimension. Through an autobiographical framework of striving for support, audiences receive an authentic and realistic impression of transgenderism and how they can contribute to understanding and accepting diversity.

Conclusions and Implications

From national politics to local community engagement, diversity, acceptance, and citizenship has emerged as a global phenomenon. Young people and educators are depended upon to foster an appreciation for differences and commit to valuing individuality. Positivity, open mindedness, and an effort to engage in understanding does not come easily, but only with these qualities can “global citizenship” be achieved. As previous research shows, an effective way to impress ideas of diversity on young students is through literature.

An examination of *I am Jazz* has provided some insight as to what youths are being taught about diversity, inclusion, and individuality. A very westernized idea, individuality has been expressed as one of the most important aspects of culture and was highlighted by Jazz in her call to appreciate uniqueness and differences. Jazz’s story reaches far beyond educating readers about transgenderism and encourages acceptance of all forms of differences. As seen through the analysis, Jazz’s narrative appeals to different audiences and has the potential to influence readers’ worldviews.

In general, rhetoric has great power to create culture, civics, and community. As Kenneth Anderson describes in his speech, ethical communication is vital for fostering healthy growth of

communities and government (14). According to Anderson, an important part of the modern education system is the incorporation of civic engagement “both in theory and in practice, focusing upon social issues relevant to students and finally leading students to reflect on ‘the intellectual and moral capacities needed for responsible citizenship’” (15). This notion of citizenship returns as a product of ethical communication. As found in earlier research, promoting and creating global citizens is an important element in education, and through books and lessons students are encouraged to become more open minded. This creates a significant link between the lessons and books children are exposed to and the ethical values of the narrative.

As Fisher alluded to in his early writings, accurate storytelling is “Narrative reality... an attempt to recapture Aristotle’s concept of *phronesis*, ‘practical wisdom’” (Fisher, “Narrative” 350). The practical wisdom that Aristotle sought can be found in the lessons and experiences communicated through narration. With accurate narration, ethical storytelling produces ethical communication; *I am Jazz* is an example of how storytelling creates an ethical communication phenomenon geared toward positive community building. Because of its autobiographical nature and simple vocabulary, *Jazz* creates a reliable narrative that allows readers to trust her perspective and believe her message and therefore embody the goals of the narration.

Beyond *I am Jazz*, Jazz Jennings has continued to tell her story through a variety of mediums to continue educating and empowering audiences. In addition to the children’s book, Jazz wrote a full-length autobiography called *Being Jazz: My Life as a (Transgender) Teen* and the family has a TLC reality television show called “I am Jazz.” The commercialized and public nature of Jazz’s life has received support and criticism alike. A quick search of Jazz Jennings on the Internet produces a slew of headlines that indicate the emotionally charged reactions: “I am Jazz’ Book Creates Controversy and Hope,” “TLC Show ‘I am Jazz’ Celebrates Child Abuse,”

“Hate Group Forces School to Cancel ‘I am Jazz’ Reading.” The appreciation and disapproval that the Jennings family has received from their books and show is a clear indication of the need for open discussion and education about gender identity with an emphasis on acceptance.

I am Jazz, indeed, lends itself to controversy. The choice to incorporate and invite children into the discussion of transgenderism is debatable. Psychologists have spent years researching the development of gender, agreeing that media, culture, and socioeconomics impacts children’s identification (Bussey 2). Producing a media artifact intended for children, with a child as the main character, offers a radical platform for talking about gender. Introducing new definitions and ideas of gender could be confusing to young audiences who don’t grasp the biological and psychological influences. According to child development researchers, “The process of sex-role development across the third year of life may move from one of reinforcement for appropriate toy preferences... to application of this knowledge to the self on a consistent basis” (Weinraub et al 1502). This implies that by the age of three, children are well into the process of developing personal interpretations and personification of gender. For young readers at the age of five or six, learning about transgenderism through the lens of another child may encourage unintended changes in personal identification.

In order for the authors to create a balance between preaching acceptance and educating readers about gender dysphoria, perhaps alterations to the relational representation of Jazz as a character could be considered. The illustrations, as well as the narrative, create a dichotomy between Jazz and all other characters. While this effectively emphasizes the difficulty that Jazz faces as a transgender child, it ignores other gender identities. For a developing child exposed to *I am Jazz*, a reader might interpret the focus on Jazz as an attempt to dismiss other identities and suggest that transgenderism is more important. The rhetorical effort to highlight Jazz as a

misunderstood child is a powerful tool when used responsibly. When a portion of the target audience is young children still developing their understanding of gender, there is an obligation to ethically instruct. While the authors' greater goal and theme is acceptance of individuality, the rhetorical choice to isolate the discussion of transgenderism could unintentionally influence young readers.

The specific repercussions of *I am Jazz* haven't been studied, but there is a possibility that children engaging in Jazz's story could misunderstand the authors' messages and develop confusion about gender and identification. If the broader goals and themes of diversity and self-acceptance get lost, young audiences could easily misconstrue the narrative as encouragement to change one's gender identity. While this is not the intended goal of the authors, Herthel and Jennings have no control over audiences' interpretation of their messages. The possible engagement with Jazz's story raises many questions about future effects and impacts of the book.

After athlete and reality TV star Caitlyn Jenner publicly came out as transgender in 2015, popular media was forced to discuss transgenderism on news and social platforms. Since then, the topic of transgenderism has not been openly welcomed by popular media. However, Jazz's publicity and openness comes with an agenda regardless of negative feedback: audiences are encouraged to find acceptance of all sorts of diversity. Despite the political, religious, and personal opinions about Jazz and transgenderism, the book, *I am Jazz*, describes her journey through gender dysphoria to educate audiences and spur the conversation of diversity, differences, and acceptance. Reducing the biological and psychological debates to one of individuality and self-respect makes Jazz's messages more universal and more pertinent.

Future research could examine Jazz's other book as well as her television show to see how she continues to educate audiences about transgenderism and attempts to normalize being

“different.” Communicative research could also continue the examination of children’s literature that encourages the conversation about diversity. As more and more young readers are exposed to literature that challenges stereotypes, changes on social media, the news, and other medias will be interesting to observe.

Children are born into a world of sending and receiving messages. The first years of life are spent absorbing, interpreting, and reflecting surroundings. The words, pictures, and stories found in books at young, impressionable ages are highly important for children’s emotional and cultural development. It is the responsibility of educators, parents, authors, and accountable citizens to understand the impact of the lessons to which exposed.

Conclusion

This study found ways in which ideas of diversity and acceptance are communicated through the settings, characters, narrator, and intended audiences of *I am Jazz*. The settings were important because of their familiarity and relatability with audiences. The characters deliberately displayed positive and negative reactions to Jazz to communicate the importance of acceptance and appreciation. Jazz, as the narrator, provided readers with intimate insight and understandings of this difficult transition as well as important messages of self-acceptance and embracing unique qualities. The intended audiences of *I am Jazz* function as educators and learners of the lessons of inclusivity and diversity. These elements create a communicative phenomenon in which readers and viewers engage with Jazz’s experience as she grapples with being “different.”

It is important to realize the great power of words, pictures, and narrative structure to instruct and influence audiences. As young generations begin to participate and engage in a continually diversifying world, it is necessary to teach and display positive interactions and

reactions to different types of people. The book *I am Jazz* makes use of the rhetorical and narrative design to impact readers emotionally and educationally. Whether or not *I am Jazz* becomes a household staple, the book has already produced emotional, political, and religious responses that will impact readers for years to come.

Works Cited

- Almerico, Gina. "Building Character through Literacy with Children's Literature." *Research in Higher Education* vol. 26, 2014. *Communication & Mass Media Complete*. Accessed 28 September 16.
- Anderson, Kenneth E. *Recovering the Civic Culture: The Imperative of Ethical Communication*. Pearson, 2005. Print.
- Atkinson, Joshua. "Thumbing Their Noses At 'The Man': An Analysis of Resistance Narratives about Multinational Corporations." *Popular Communication* vol. 1, no. 3, 2003, pp. 163, *Communication & Mass Media Complete*. Accessed 26 October 16.
- Bradberry, Debbie. "Using Children's Literature to Build Concepts of Teaching about Global Citizenship." *Joint AARE APERA Conference, Sydney, Australia, 2012*. University of Newcastle, NSW, Australia. Web. 1 October 16.
- Bussey, K., & Bandura, A. (1999). Social Cognitive Theory of Gender Development and Differentiation. *Psychological Review*, 106, 676-713.
- Caldiero, Christopher T. "Crisis Storytelling: Fisher's Narrative Paradigm and News Reporting." *American Communication Journal* vol. 9, no. 1, 2007. *Communication & Mass Media Complete*. Accessed 27 October 16.
- "Character Education...Our Shared Responsibility." *U.S. Department of Education*, 31 March 2005. Accessed 8 October 16.
- Clair, Robin P., Stephanie Carlo, Chervin Lam, John Nussman, Canek Phillips, Virginia Sánchez, Elaine Schnabel, and Liliya Yakova. "Narrative Theory and Criticism: An

- Overview Toward Clusters and Empathy.” *The Review of Communication* vol. 14, no. 1, 2014, pp. 1-18. *Communication & Mass Media Complete*. Accessed 24 October 16.
- Davies, Lynn. “Global Citizenship: Abstraction or Framework for Action?” *Educational Review*, vol. 58, no. 1, 2006, pp. 5-25. *Communication & Mass Media Complete*. Accessed 24 October 16.
- Eaves, Michael H., and Michael Savoie. "Big Brother: Merging Reality and Fiction: An Application of the Narrative Paradigm." *Texas Speech Communication Journal*, vol. 29, no. 2, 2005, pp. 91-97. *Communication & Mass Media Complete*. Accessed 27 October 2016.
- Fisher, Walter. “Narration as a Human Communication Paradigm: The Case of Public Moral Argument.” *Communication Monographs*, vol. 51, 1984, pp. 1-30. Web. 24 October 2016.
- Fisher, Walter. “The Narrative Paradigm: An Elaboration.” *Communication Monographs*, vol. 52, 1985, pp. 347-367. Web. 9 November 16.
- Foss, Sonja K. *Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice* 4th ed. Waveland, 2009. Print.
- Freeman, Greta Griffin. “The Implementation of Character Education and Children’s Literature to Teach Bullying Characteristics and Prevention Strategies to Preschool Children: An Action Research Project.” *Early Childhood Education*, vol. 42, 2014, pp. 305-316. *Communication & Mass Media Complete*. Accessed 2 October 16.

- Garrison, Kasey L., Danielle E. Forest, and Sue C. Kimmel. "Curation in Translation: Promoting Global Citizenship through Literature." *School Libraries Worldwide*, vol. 20, no. 1, 2014. *Communication & Mass Media Complete*. Accessed 2 October 2016.
- "Global Citizenship." *Oxfam*. N.d, oxfam.org.uk/education/global-citizenship. Accessed 8 October 16.
- Gopalakrishnan, Ambika. *Multicultural Children's Literature: A Critical Issues Approach*. Sage, 2011. Print.
- Herthel, Jessica and Jazz Jennings. *I am Jazz*. Penguin Group, 2014. Print.
- Larkins, Cath. "Enacting Children's Citizenship: Developing Understandings of How Children Enact Themselves as Citizens through Actions and Acts of Citizenship." *Childhood*, vol. 21, no. 1, 2014, pp. 7-21. *Communication & Mass Media Complete*. Accessed 2 October 16.
- Lintner, Timothy. "Using 'Exceptional' Children's Literature to Promote Character Education in Elementary Social Studies Classrooms." *The Social Studies*, 2011, pp. 200-203. *Communication & Mass Media Complete*. Accessed 2 October 16.
- Marshall, Elizabeth. "Stripping the Wolf: Rethinking Representation of Gender in Children's Literature." *Research Reading Quarterly*, vol. 39, no. 3, 2004, pp. 256-270. *Communication & Mass Media Complete*. Accessed 2 October 16.
- Rasmussen, Eric E., Autumn Shafer, Malinda J. Colwell, Shawna White, Narissra Punyanunt-Carter, Rebecca L. Densley, and Holly Wright. "Relation Between Active Meditation, Exposure to *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood*, and US Preschoolers' Social and Emotional

- Development.” *Journal of Children and Media*, vol. 10, no. 4, 2016. *Communication & Mass Media Complete*. Accessed 24 October 16.
- Salisbury, Tonya. “Using Globally Significant Children’s Literature to Increase Fourth-Grade Students’ Global Attitudes and Intercultural Sensitivity.” *Waldon Dissertations and Doctoral Studies*, 2010. *Communication & Mass Media Complete*. Accessed 3 October 16.
- Weinraub, Marsha, Lynda Pritchard Clemens, Alan Sockloff, Teresa Ethridge, Edward Gracely, and Barbara Myers. “The Development of Sex Role Stereotypes in the Third Year: Relationships to Gender Labeling, Gender Identity, Sex-typed Toy Preference, and Family Characteristics.” *Child Development*, vol. 55, no. 4, 1984, pp. 493-1503. *Wiley*. Accessed 24 January 2017.
- Wood, Jennifer. “Living by Parental Narratives: A Narrative Criticism of Marian Wright Edelman’s *The Measure of Our Success: A Letter to my Children and Yours*.” *Texas Speech Communication Journal*, vol. 29, no. 2, 2005, pp. 106-117. *Communication & Mass Media Complete*. Accessed 26 October 2016.
- Young, Cory. "Contemporary Native American Rhetoric: A Narrative Criticism of The Cherokee Rally." *Texas Speech Communication Journal* vol. 29, no. 2, 2005, pp. 131-141. *Communication & Mass Media Complete*. Accessed 26 October 2016.