# Rainbows in Pixels: LGBTQ Representation on Animated Content in YouTube Kids

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### Abstrak

*Munculnya konten LGBTQ di YouTube Kids menjadi isu penting karena platform ini sangat populer di kalangan anak-anak, tetapi menimbulkan kontroversi di Indonesia akibat bertentangan dengan norma sosial. Penelitian ini bertujuan menelaah bagaimana tema LGBTQ direpresentasikan dalam video animasi anak-anak di YouTube Kids. Dengan teori representasi dan analisis konten kualitatif, penelitian ini menganalisis bagaimana tema LGBTQ ditampilkan dalam enam video animasi anak-anak menggunakan analisis isi kualitatif dengan lembar koding visual, dialog, dan narasi. Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa identitas lesbian, gay, transgender, dan queer direpresentasikan melalui karakter manusia dan antropomorfis, baik secara implisit maupun eksplisit. Tema LGBTQ disampaikan sebagai bagian dari narasi luas atau secara khusus menyoroti pengalaman LGBTQ. Representasi ini meskipun tidak mencolok, memiliki potensi membentuk pemahaman anak-anak tentang identitas gender dan seksualitas. Penelitian ini menekankan pentingnya kebijakan media yang sensitif terhadap budaya lokal namun tetap mendukung inklusi global.*

**Kata Kunci:** *Analisis isi kualitatif, konten media anak, representasi LGBTQ, YouTube Kids.*

### Abstract

*The emergence of LGBTQ content on YouTube Kids has become a concern, given its popularity among children, and has sparked controversy in Indonesia for conflicting with social norms. This study aims to examine how LGBTQ themes are represented in children's animated videos on YouTube Kids. Using representation theory and qualitative content analysis, this study examines how LGBTQ themes are depicted in six children's animated videos, employing visual coding sheets, dialogue analysis, and narrative analysis. The results show that lesbian, gay, transgender, and queer identities are represented through human and anthropomorphic characters, both implicitly and explicitly. LGBTQ themes are presented as part of a broader narrative or are specifically highlighted to showcase LGBTQ experiences. While these representations are not overt, they have the potential to shape children's understanding of gender identity and sexuality. This study highlights the importance of media policies that are sensitive to local cultures while promoting global inclusion.*

**Keywords:** *Children media content, LGBTQ representation, qualitative content analysis, YouTube Kids.*

## INTRODUCTION

Children's media shapes children's behavior, beliefs, and social values (Hamlen & Imbesi, 2020; Ristiniemi & Ahmadi, 2021; Ward & Grower, 2020). Nowadays, children can easily access media content from various cultures and perspectives, one of which is through YouTube Kids (Sarwar et al., 2024). YouTube is a popular platform used by 28.23% of the

children population in Indonesia (Rachman, 2022). Additionally, global data shows that viewing time on YouTube Kids increased by 14% in 2023 (Pratnyawan, 2024). Children can easily engage with content that reflects different cultural values and social norms through platforms like YouTube. Through this, YouTube can shape how they see the world.

Diversity and inclusivity are critical topics for today's society, as demonstrated by the rise of discourse related to themes of gender identity and sexuality, such as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and other (LGBTQ+) identities. This theme frequently appears in various media, including children's media. Yadav and Kalia (2022) disclosed that including LGBTQ themes in children's media is an effort to provide an image of acceptance, identity exploration, normalization of diverse identities, and inclusivity.

With the popularity of YouTube Kids, its representation of LGBTQ themes has been highlighted as problematic. Many scholarly discussions on LGBTQ in children's media highlight its role in shaping children's empathetic perceptions and behavior regarding various gender identities (Capuzza, 2020; Miller, 2019; Van Wichelen et al., 2024; Yadav & Kalia, 2022). However, despite this perspective, conservative values, like in Indonesia, tend to oppose LGBTQ ideology.

Indonesia continues to display strong conservative attitudes, particularly about LGBTQ issues, which are reflected in various social, legal, and cultural measures. Indonesia's Muslim-majority society has increasingly shown hostility toward LGBTQ individuals, viewing non-normative sexuality and gender as a threat to the state, religion, and social morality (Kholid, 2024; Puspitasari, 2019). Laws and regulations, such as the Pornography Law and local regulations in some regions, adopt religiously based moral standards to target same-sex relationships and non-normative gender identities, exacerbating stigma against the LGBTQ community (Kholid, 2024; Puspitasari, 2019). At the local level, heteronormative norms are deeply entrenched, with large organizations such as Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama viewing LGBTQ identities as sinful and deviant (Kholid, 2024; Puspitasari, 2019). This results in significant stigma, social exclusion, and discrimination against LGBTQ individuals, as experienced by the *waria* community (Asbi et al., 2024).

Consequently, it signifies the tensions between the progressive views of global media and the norms of local society. In Indonesia, LGBTQ visibility, especially in children's media, is a sensitive and controversial topic as it is perceived as conflicting with sincerely held religious and cultural values, with many parties, including conservative groups, linking this issue to threats to national identity and traditional values (Ridwan & Wu, 2018; Wijaya, 2022).

Regarding children's media, parents worry that this exposure may damage the development of their children's character and mindset, which are still in the formative stages and are highly curious. They fear that children may imitate the behavior they see without understanding the consequences, especially when the content is considered inappropriate according to prevailing social and religious norms (Kurnia & Riyantini, 2019; Solihin et al., 2023). From the perspective of Indonesian society, which is heavily influenced by religious norms, particularly Islam, LGBTQ behavior is often viewed as a social deviation that can mislead children (Yanuarti, 2019).

Parents are also concerned about the normalization of this behavior in the media, such as the portrayal of same-sex parents in children's films, which is considered contrary to traditional family values and religious morality (Zulmi & Alamiah, 2024). Additionally, with the advancement of technology and increased accessibility to LGBTQ content on platforms that are supposed to be safe, parents find it increasingly difficult to control their children's exposure and ensure they remain in an environment aligned with the values they teach (Zulmi & Alamiah, 2024). Policymakers and religious parties have even expressed concerns about the influence of foreign media on traditional values (CNN Indonesia, 2019; Larasati, 2023; Sani & Amirullah, 2018; Tejomukti, 2023), making it increasingly difficult to accept progressive representations of gender and sexuality.

In 2023, there was controversy regarding shows on YouTube Kids that contained LGBTQ themes. One of the shows highlighted is an Indonesian version of a children's song titled "*Saat Kecelakaan Terjadi*". This audiovisual content uploaded by Lellobee Indonesia's YouTube channel features two adult men whose roles are emphasized through the lyrics, which state, "... *papa and my father are ready to help*". This image of a pair of same-sex parents became the focus of society (Farouk, 2023).

The Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) and the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (KPPPA) consider LGBTQ as behavior that is unorthodox to Indonesian values and culture. Responding to the emergence of LGBTQ content for children, KPAI petitioned to keep children away from LGBTQ exposure (Dewi, 2023; Mursid & Dwinanda, 2023). Responding to the same thing, Indonesian netizens expressed concern regarding gender identity and expression teaching, which can be confusing for children (HaiBunda, 2023), i.e., blurring normative boundaries and cultural expectations about gender (Miller, 2019; Van Wichelen et al., 2024).

Stuart Hall emphasized two critical roles of the media in cultural identity representation: a mirror of reality and a tool for ideological construction. While representation can strengthen specific power structures, resistance efforts are carried out when marginalized groups are involved by presenting alternative perspectives that challenge the mainstream narrative (Hall, 1988, 2013; Jhally, 1997; Platonov, 2024). Hall sees marginality as a potential space for creativity and resistance to articulate their experiences, i.e., challenging marginalization, recovering history, and creating alternative narratives (Hall, 1997, 2005; Platonov, 2024). This perspective confirms that the media plays an essential role in counter-hegemony efforts.

In children's media, representation actively serves to maintain dominant ideologies. Adukia et al. (2023) assert that illustrations and characters in children's books "shape understandings of race, gender, and age" through visual imagery, rather than merely reflecting reality. Saha (2024) expands on this idea, stating that a "representational regime" constructively produces social meanings and reinforces cultural norms. Children's cartoons "direct ideological behavior and values," thereby making media a tool for social control (Şenocak & Ayyıldız, 2021). Additionally, while individuals reproduce dominant culture in their daily practices, children act as "ideological clay" that is ideal for instilling society's core values (Ayyıldız, 2019; Şenocak & Ayyıldız, 2021). Thus, the representation of children, whether in books or animation, works synergistically to reproduce and reinforce the identity and ideology of the majority.

Representation studies often discuss about the LGBTQ community as a marginalized group. In the late 1980s, Queer Theory emerged as a response to the limitations of gay and lesbian studies by challenging identity categories, sexuality, and gender norms. Influenced by scholars such as Judith Butler and Michel Foucault, this theory criticizes the binary concept and emphasizes freedom of identity. While focusing on the social experiences of marginalized groups, this theory critically examines dominant cultural narratives that define normality, especially regarding the power dynamics inherent in language and representation (Elliott & Kirsch, 2021; Goodrich et al., 2016; Lewis, 2022; Li, 2024; Riggs & Treharne, 2017; Ryan, 2020; Wozolek, 2023).

Queer studies focusing on the representation of LGBTQ identity in children's media, such as films, books, television programs, and animation, have been widely conducted (Dennis, 2012). These researches showcased that children's media depicted LGBTQ characters and family narratives alongside romantic storylines to highlight gender and sexuality

expressions (Hedberg et al., 2022; Snyder et al., 2023). Creators of children's media face the challenge of balancing inclusivity with societal norms. Often, this is done by adapting the content to the child's age while aiming to foster empathy and understanding of gender diversity and sexual identity (Schaefer, 2023; Van Wichelen & Dhoest, 2023; Yadav & Kalia, 2022).

According to Gerbner's Cultivation Theory, children as an audience are vulnerable to media content influence as audiences sometimes see media content as a social reality. Many cultivation studies identified and examined elements in the media, one of which is gender identity and sexuality in new media (Morgan et al., 2014; Siddiqui, 2019). Prior researches (Qutub & Muhammad, 2022; Siddiqui, 2019) used cultivation theory to show that YouTube exposure has cognitive, social, and cultural impacts on children. Children may imitate the behavior incorporated in YouTube videos and learn about different cultures and perspectives. Additionally, some content may promote values that do not follow the child's culture or family norms (Qutub & Muhammad, 2022). This indicates concern over imitation and internalization of conflicting ideologies.

When accessing content, children tend to prefer animated content. Animated content effectively combines entertainment and education, simplifies complex concepts, and is more accessible and memorable for children (Rohmiatun, 2024). Trust and attachment to animated characters (Neumann & Herodotou, 2020b) facilitate learning because children are more engaged with content and familiar characters (Aguiar et al., 2019). This preference highlights the potential of animation on YouTube Kids as a medium of representation.

The debate over children's media representation of the LGBTQ community in Indonesia is firmly rooted in the conservative values of religious beliefs and cultural norms. Global platforms that offer easy access for children, such as YouTube Kids, reinforce the tension between efforts for diversity representation and local ideological attitudes that reject non-normative identities. This tension raises questions about children's media content selection and its consequences. However, in order to look at the impact of this exposure, there is a gap in apprehending the representation of LGBTQ identities in children's media. For this reason, this research aims to explore the depth of LGBTQ themes representation in children's content on YouTube Kids through qualitative content analysis. This research provides a thematic analysis evaluating the framing of LGBTQ identities in children's media content.

## RESEARCH METHOD

Exploring media representations requires in-depth analysis as it depends on the context and meaning behind the content (Hall, 1988, 2013; Harman, 2016) rather than the frequency of occurrence. Therefore, this research uses qualitative content analysis to analyze primary content, which includes explicit themes, central ideas, and latent content or implicit contextual information (Creswell, 2013; Krippendorff, 2019; Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2023; Mayring, 2000).

Purposively, this research screened six videos as research samples, as the number of content samples is not emphasized in qualitative research (Krippendorff, 2019). The samples were filtered using a dummy account on YouTube Kids with a new email address to avoid algorithm bias. For comprehensive selection, this dummy account explored three content categories offered by YouTube Kids: preschool age (4 years and under), ages 5-8, and ages 9-12.

This research uses specific keywords to filter the content on YouTube Kids. The determination of keywords began with familiarisation with terms related to LGBTQ from relevant literature. These keywords were then enriched by identifying specific trending terms (Punziano et al., 2023) that frequently appear in children's media. This identification is conducted through an exploratory or scoping search on YouTube Kids, utilising various terms in both English and Indonesian to assess the distribution of results and the relevance of the content. This process ensures that the selected keywords represent both formal labels and popular expressions used by content creators and viewers (Punziano et al., 2023).

The keywords (i.e., variations of LGBTQ, two dads, two moms, and rainbow family) revealed 20 accessible animated contents over the past 10 years and various subcategories (i.e., episodes of children's series, nursery rhymes and songs, sing-alongs, and storytimes). Then, the samples were reduced to obtain content with high exposure based on the number of views and re-selected based on content type so that there is a representation of each content subcategory. The research objects are shown in Table 1 below.

**Table 1. Animation Content on YouTube Kids as Research Object**

| No | Channel | Title | Subcategory | Views |
|----|---------|-------|-------------|-------|
| 1 | Peppa Pig - Official Channel (2023) | Penny Polar Bear's Mummies - Family Time (00:00- 4:26) | Serial episode compilation | 15,554,497 |

| 2 | Little Baby Bum (2020) | Johny Johny Yes Papas Song | Nursery Rhymes and Songs | 5,411,403 |
| 3 | Blue's Clues & You (2021) | The Blue's Clues Pride Parade | Singalong | 4,601,556 |
| 4 | Gecko's Garage (2022) | Truck Family Valentines Day | Serial episode | 970,334 |
| 5 | Pop'n'Olly \| Olly Pike (2015) | Jamie - A Transgender Cinderella Story | Story time | 521,750 |
| 6 | Netflix Jr. (CoComelon) (2023) | Family Time Fun! - Just Be You (04:47-07:28) | Singalong Compilation | 479,285 |

Source: Researcher, 2024

Data collection and analysis were based on a coding sheet that adapted thematic categories from previous research to bridge the concept of children's media and LGBTQ representation in visuals, dialogue, and narrative. The visual dimension limits LGBTQ readings from what is visible in the content (Caldwell, 2014; Cook, 2018; Farnworth, 2022; Gultom & Nuru, 2024; Jacobs & Meeusen, 2021; Jennings & Macgillivray, 2011; Leung & Adams-Whittaker, 2022; Miller, 2019; Razal, 2023), dialogue dimension limits it verbally (Jacobs & Meeusen, 2021; Leung & Adams-Whittaker, 2022), while narrative dimension focusing on storytelling related to LGBTQ characters and issues (Farnworth, 2022; Jacobs & Meeusen, 2021; Jennings & Macgillivray, 2011; Leung & Adams-Whittaker, 2022). These thematic categories can be seen as units of analysis in Table 3.2 below.

**Table 2. Units of Analysis for Representation of LGBTQ Themes**

| Dimension | Indicator | Description |
|---|---|---|
| Visual | Expression of LGBTQ identity | Identify the character's identity |
| | Visible homosexual behavior | Same-sex hugging, embracing, holding hands, etc. |
| | Visual depiction | Character physique |
| Dialogue | Use of term | LGBTQ references in dialogue |

| Narrative | Attitudes towards LGBTQ character | Positive, negative, or neutral |
|---|---|---|
| | The position of the LGBTQ narrative | Main or supplementary narrative |
| | LGBTQ cultures | The experiences, culture, everyday life, or conflicts of LGBTQ characters |

Source: Researcher, 2024

The coding sheet has passed the intercoder reliability test. This research has confirmed agreement between the two coders in identifying coded segments or the segment boundaries and categorization used (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2023). Therefore, the reliability of the coding sheet is guaranteed because the coding process is based on the consistency of assessment between coders.

After that, data was gathered by reading the six videos and describing them based on the indicators above, sorting and summarizing them into specific themes, mapping them, and describing their connections (Creswell & Creswell Báez, 2021). Existing data was analyzed by identifying manifest aspects of the content based on indicators, and the latent meaning was subsequently interpreted. This interpretation uses contextual comparison by comparing data and gender identity discourse. This step is carried out to see the characteristics and thematic patterns of content by selecting relevant information. The findings from this research are then presented descriptively to answer the research objectives (Miles et al., 2013).

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

To examine how LGBTQ identities are represented, it is necessary to first define gender identification as the default settings. In researching audiovisual content, the most straightforward aspect to observe is the visual data.

Gender in human characters is examined based on physical designs and traditional gender expressions. Meanwhile, gender in anthropomorphic characters is identified based on design patterns in the content. In the "Penny Polar Bear's Mummies" content, the characters are depicted in 2D with a distinguishing circular body shape for males and a semicircular shape with curly eyelashes for females.

The gender of the anthropomorphic characters in "The Blue's Clues Pride Parade" is quite challenging to identify. Clothing attributes, usually identity markers, are displayed

randomly to reflect freedom of expression. However, this content intended to convey an inclusivity message so that traditional gender determination is insignificant.

Lastly, the central characters in "Truck Family Valentines Day" are depicted anthropomorphically: vehicle objects and animals. However, the character's gender identity can be seen from the detailed depiction of the curled eyelashes of the character, who is supposedly female.

### *LGBTQ Representation on Animated Content in YouTube Kids*

Based on the coding results, there were theme categories that appeared from the six samples: Lesbian, Gay, Transgender and Queer themes. The findings from these themes will be examined based on visual, dialogue, and narrative aspects.

1. **Lesbian Representation**

    Lesbian themes are found in the content "Penny Polar Bear's Mummies - Family Time" and "Truck Family Valentines Day". Both are episodes from two children's series, *Peppa Pig* and *Gecko's Garage*. Based on their accessibility via YouTube Kids, both contents can be accessed by account profiles for preschool children (ages 0-4 years). This accessibility shows that children of all ages can access both contents.

    ### *1.1."Penny Polar Bear's Mummies - Family Time"*

    The story piece "Family Time" conveys a lesbian theme by depicting a pair of mothers. The character Penny identifies both of her mothers' identities as lesbians by saying, "*I live with my mummy and my other mummy. One mummy is a doctor, and one mummy cooks spaghetti*!". Madame Gazelle responds positively by saying, "*Lovely, Penny!*" and "*Yes, what wonderful drawings of the families!*".

    The main narrative in this content is family diversity, with a lesbian theme that enriches it. Lesbian narratives appear to show the division of public and domestic roles between homosexual couples as well as the experiences of children living among homosexual couples.

    ### *1.2."Truck Family Valentines Day"*

    This video depicts Valentine's Day culture for LGBTQ people by showing a pair of mothers celebrating it. The character Gecko identifies the two mothers' lesbian identities by referring to them as "Mummy," "Mama," and "Mummies."

Visually, the lesbian identity is made clear in the scene of Mummy Truck and Mama Recycle leaning on each other, as seen in Figure 1 below.



**Figure 1. Lesbian scene in "Truck Family Valentines Day"**

## 2. Gay Representation

"Johny Johny Yes Papas Song" and "Family Time Fun! - Just Be You" contain gay themes. While account profiles of all ages can access the content "Family Time Fun! - Just Be You", interestingly, only account profiles with a minimum age of 5 years old can access the "Johny Johny Yes Papas Song" content.

### 2.1. *"Johny Johny Yes Papas Song"*

In this video, Johny's character is shown to have two fathers. Gay identity in this content can be easily identified from the term "Papas" used in the title and song lyrics. The term refers to a pair of fathers rather than one father (i.e., "papa").

While not showing any homosexual affective interaction, the pair of fathers are depicted in a stereotypical way: one papa in a more masculine design and the other papa in a more feminine design, which is emphasized by blushed cheeks. This depiction can be seen in Figure 2 below. Along with happy music, narratives about the daily lives of gay couples or families are conveyed positively.

**Figure 2. Depiction of two fathers in "Johny Johny Yes Papas Song"**

### 2.2. *"Family Time Fun! - Just Be You"*

This content has the fewest LGBTQ elements, where the gay theme is primarily found visually only. It tells the story of Nico's character, who is confused when choosing clothes. Two adult men appear to help him. The gay identity of the two characters is implicitly inferred through their appearance together and intimate interactions, such as clasping each other's backs and waists.

As music content, this content lacks spoken dialogue, so it is challenging to identify LGBTQ themes through words. However, the song's lyrics contain a message of encouragement regarding expressing one's identity. This message is conveyed through the lyrics:

*Who am I?*
*I can't decide*
*Start with the things you like to do*
*Just be you*

While the central theme is freedom of self-expression, this content does not only include gay identity. In one scene, Nico (despite being depicted as a boy) is shown wearing a ballet tutu and princess crown, which girls generally wear. This shows that the theme of other gender expressions, along with the gay theme, are present together to convey a positive narrative of gender and sexuality inclusivity.

### 3. Transgender Representation

The Transgender theme is only found in "Jamie - A Transgender Cinderella Story". Unlike the other samples, this content is easy to find because it contains the

keyword "transgender" in the title. Pop'n'Olly uploaded this animated slideshow storytime content. During the sample selection, it was learned that this content could only be accessed by account profiles aged 9 years and over, making it exclusive to the older children group.

The content "Jamie - A Transgender Cinderella Story" tells about Jamie's transition from being born into a female body to becoming a male. Jamie identified this gender identity, backed by his depiction as a woman with long hair who then transitioned to shortening his hair like a man and wearing a men's tuxedo. This clarifies Jamie's gender identity as a transmale.

Transgender themes are also found verbally, although they do not use typical LGBTQ terms. In this content, there is a change in the pronoun used to refer to Jamie. At first, he was referred to as "she/her" which later changed to "he/his". This transgender theme is identified through both Jamie's dialogue and the narrator's:

> 01.40 – 01.59: She wished that she could feel right because she didn't. She didn't feel right at all. Not in her body, that is. You see, how Jamie felt inside didn't match up with what she saw in the mirror and, oh, how she wished it could.

> 06.58 – 07.25: *"This... this is me, this is Jamie."* Jamie smiled for finally looking back was the person Jamie was inside. And it wasn't the hair or the suit or the pumpkin car, but it was Jamie. Jamie finally understanding who he was, *"...and I'm a boy, I always have been."* Jamie said excitedly to the mice.

This content deliberately uses transgender themes to disclose gender transition by telling stories about gender transition experiences, including feelings of confusion about one's gender, physical and clothing transitions, and the societal responses. Interestingly, this content is the only one that shows negative attitudes towards LGBTQ characters, such as denial of gender transition. This denial was shown by Jamie's older brothers, who were reluctant to lend him men's clothes and scissors to cut Jamie's hair. However, there is a princess character who accepts Jamie's transmale identity and even supports him in expressing his gender identity to his two older brothers.

4. **Queer Representation**

Bisexual themes are discussed under the umbrella of Queer themes because no stand-alone bisexual content is found. However, "The Blue's Clues Pride Parade"

covers themes of inclusivity, including Bisexual and Queer diversity. This content is a singalong content uploaded by the Blue's Clues & You account. As an animated content, this video features American Drag Queen Nina West as the voice actor. Based on its accessibility, this content can be accessed by account profiles of all ages.

Based on the title, "The Blue's Clues Pride Parade" conveys the main narrative in the form of diversity in family types and the dynamics of identity within the family through the concept of pride month celebration. Song lyrics are one of the elements used to reference LGBTQ identity in this content. The terms used include "two mommies", "two daddies", "non-binary", "trans member", "ace, bi, and pan grownups", "allies to the queer community", "queer friends", and "happy pride month!". The depiction of various identities with symbols of flags, balloons, and other rainbow attributes reinforces the representation of identity. Alongside, various LGBTQ identities are depicted by grouping types of families into a lesbian family, a gay family, a non-binary family, a trans family, diverse families, and other identity groups (ace, bi, and pan), as well as queer ally groups.

### Synergy of Visuals, Dialogue and Narrative in Constructing Child-Friendly Inclusive Messages

Representation is a process that constructs meaning through cultural discourse and is not limited to how to describe reality (Hall, 2013). In line with previous research (Yadav & Kalia, 2022), the representation of LGBTQ groups as marginalized groups in children's media is an effort to provide understanding regarding gender inclusivity and sexual identity. In new media, such representation is communicated in three sub-dimensions: visual, dialogue, and narrative.

The visual aspect is a mode to see whether LGBTQ identity is visually evident based on physical depictions and character behavior. As previously described, the physical depiction of characters might challenge the identification of LGBTQ identity in children's animated content. The challenge predominantly comes from anthropomorphic characters.

Leung and Adams-Whittaker's research (2022) discusses the use anthropomorphic characters to represent LGBTQ. Anthropomorphic characters are used as subtle signs or symbols to define homosexual relationships and diverse family identities in a way that is appropriate for children. This strategy was found in three content samples with

anthropomorphic characters, where the use of animal characters allowed "The Blue's Clues Pride Parade" to present the most diverse depictions of gender identity and sexuality.

However, in their writing, Leung and Adams-Whittaker (2022) also discuss how LGBTQ representation through anthropomorphic characters might induce confusion in children. This idea is based on the assumption that children will have difficulty engaging with these characters and reflecting on-screen messages in real life. Hejazi (2023) also argues that anthropomorphic characters can restrain children's literacy competence due to the potential for confusion between fact and fiction. This emphasizes that anthropomorphic animated content can hinder children's understanding related to LGBTQ dynamics, such as recognizing gender identity.

Regarding the dialogue aspect, the research results show that LGBTQ themes in animated content on YouTube Kids are conveyed through conversation, narration, or song lyrics. Neumann and Herodotou (2020a) refers to it as design features or how content on YouTube is presented to children. This aspect functions to explain verbally what is going on on the screen. The dialogue aspect plays an important role in articulating gender and sexuality identities to explain diversity and challenge heteronormative norms (Capuzza, 2020; Van Wichelen & Dhoest, 2023; Yadav & Kalia, 2022).

Diamond (2020) discusses that children begin to identify, label, and use gender categories as early as 18 months. Screen media, such as YouTube Kids, plays a role in introducing and using distinctive terms (Candarli, 2023; Kusmanto et al., 2021; Neumann & Herodotou, 2020a). This research sample shows that animated content on YouTube Kids uses typical LGBTQ terms to represent it. This is evident in the use of the terms "mommies/mummies", "daddies", "papas", "non-binary", "trans member/transgender", "ace", "bi", "pan", and "pride". These terms are easily found in titles, conversations, narratives, and song lyrics.

Narratively, LGBTQ themes might be represented as additional narratives rather than the main narrative. This means that the animated content on YouTube Kids does not always revolve around LGBTQ themes, although the "The Blue's Clues Pride Parade" and "Jamie - A Transgender Cinderella Story" are specially made based on this theme. This subtle representation suggests that LGBTQ groups use children's media to restore identity and normalize it rather than forcing it to extremes (Hall, 1997, 2005, 2013; Harman, 2016). This normalization can be seen in how the content narrates the experiences and culture of the LGBTQ community, such as social or personal conflicts, daily lives, LGBTQ-related events,

and interactions between the LGBTQ community and people outside the community (Leung & Adams-Whittaker, 2022). These types of exposure can build children's perspectives towards LGBTQ people in cultural and social dimensions. In the cultural dimension, this exposure plays a role in forming cultural norms, expectations, and fundamental beliefs regarding LGBTQ (Capuzza, 2020; Miller, 2019; Yadav & Kalia, 2022). Meanwhile, in the social dimension, its role is to develop stereotypical as well as counter-stereotypical behavior related to gender, affirm gender diversity and challenge heteronormative norms, as well as provide education regarding gender identity to create an empathetic audience (Capuzza, 2020; Van Wichelen & Dhoest, 2023; Yadav & Kalia, 2022).

Appropriateness becomes a primary concern regarding children's media (Schaefer, 2023; Van Wichelen & Dhoest, 2023; Yadav & Kalia, 2022). Neumann and Herodotou (2020a) suggest this appropriateness can be seen from the appearance of positive behavior and reactions on-screen media. This research shows that content children of all ages can access tends to have a positive nuance. This nuance is identified from pleasant music, cheerful characters, and affective interactions. These depictions support the learning objectives of the content as they present social relationships and socio-emotional development (Neumann & Herodotou, 2020a).

**CONCLUSION**

In summary, this study reveals that YouTube Kids' animated content weaves LGBTQ+ identities into children's media through a blend of explicit and implicit depictions, employing human and anthropomorphic characters, dialogue cues, and narrative subplots. These representations which are ranging from overt mentions of "mommies," "daddies," and "non-binary" identities to subtler visual and behavioral signals tend to normalize lesbian, gay, transgender, and queer experiences without making them the sole focus of a story. The generally positive tone, underpinned by cheerful music and friendly interactions, suggests an intentional effort to support socio-emotional learning and foster acceptance from an early age.

Methodologically, the study's qualitative content analysis and rigorously tested coding sheet constitute its greatest strengths. By examining visual, dialogue, and narrative dimensions, it captures both the overt and nuanced ways inclusivity is communicated; intercoder reliability further bolsters confidence in these findings. At the same time, the small sample of six videos and the inherent difficulty of decoding anthropomorphic cues highlight

limitations. A broader selection of content might uncover additional patterns, and future work must address whether children actually grasp these subtleties or find them confusing.

The implications are twofold. On one hand, platforms like YouTube Kids have the potential to serve as inclusive educational spaces that respect diversity while engaging young audiences. On the other, in socially conservative settings such as Indonesia, these depictions can spark debate over cultural appropriateness, underscoring the need for media policies that balance global progressiveness with local values. Building digital literacy among parents, educators, and policymakers will be crucial to navigating these tensions.

Looking ahead, several avenues merit exploration. Audience reception studies should examine how children and caregivers interpret both human and anthropomorphic portrayals of LGBTQ+ themes. Cross-cultural comparisons can illuminate how representation strategies resonate in different societies, and longitudinal research could assess the lasting influence of early exposure on gender-identity attitudes. Finally, policy-focused inquiries into how platforms regulate and curate inclusive content will help ensure that children's media remains both diverse and contextually sensitive.

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