

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: ANXIETY AND ANXIETY-COPING IN
CHILDREN'S PICTURE BOOKS

Tung Yan Hui, Masters of Arts, 2023

Thesis Directed By: Professor Cixin Wang, Department of
Counseling, Higher Education, and Special
Education

The contribution of this study is to provide an understanding of how picture books educate young children on the common experiences of anxiety. This qualitative study used thematic analysis to analyze 82 English children's picture books for infants and young toddlers (0 to 5 years old) that were published in 2020. Picture books in this sample portray anxiety in a way that match with the clinical knowledge of childhood anxiety in terms of characterization and signs of anxiety. This study identified five major themes of anxiety-eliciting situations, namely schools, bad things happen, being alone, health and diversity. The findings of this study also include themes and patterns of coping strategies that were used by the protagonists; finding comfort, inhibiting emotions, solving problems, recognizing and expressing emotions and culturally-

related strategies are the five themes that summarize the coping strategies found in this sample. Across all types of anxiety-eliciting situations, finding comfort is the most frequently presented coping strategy. This study holds implications for caregivers, teachers and clinicians, through which they can have an idea of how anxiety is presented in some recently published children's picture books in their use of the books for educational or clinical purposes. Publishers may also take reference on the gaps noted in this study to diversify the content of anxiety-related picture books.

ANXIETY AND ANXIETY-COPING IN CHILDREN'S PICTURE BOOKS

by

Tung Yan Hui

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Advisory Committee:
Professor Cixin Wang, Chair
Professor Kelli Cummings
Professor Colleen O'Neal

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	ii
Table of Contents	iii
List of Tables	v
List of Figures	vi
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework	6
Ecological Systems Theory	6
Zone of Proximal Development	6
Emotion Theories	7
Anxiety Theories	9
Learning Theory	9
Cognitive Theory	10
Coping Theories	10
Chapter 3: Literature Review	14
Emotion Development in Early Years	14
Emotion Knowledge	15
Emotion Regulation	16
Anxiety	18
Definition	18
Characteristics	19
The Relations Between Anxiety, Fear and Worry	20
Fear	20
Worry	22
Coping with Anxiety	23
Picture Books	24
Picture Books and Emotions	26
Anxiety and Picture Books	28
Picture Books in 2020	30
Chapter 4: Method	34
Sample	34
Data Analysis	35
Codebook Development	36
Coding	39
Researcher Reflexivity	41
Chapter 5: Finding	43
Question 1: How do Picture Books Portray Anxiety?	44
Signs of Anxiety	44
Anxiety-eliciting Situations	45
Question 2: What are the Anxiety-Coping Strategies Introduced in the Picture books?	52
Chapter 6: Discussion	60
The Understanding of Childhood Anxiety	60
Coping with Anxiety	63
Implications	68

Future Directions and Limitation	72
Appendices	76
Bibliography	84

List of Tables

1. Table 1: List of Picture Books in the Sample (In Alphabetical Order)
2. Table 2: Coping Strategies Found in Anxiety-Related Children's Picture Books (In Descending Order)

List of Figures

1. Figure 1: Illustration of worrying thoughts – Strings (Averis, 2020)
2. Figure 2: Illustration of an anxious face (Higgins, 2020)
3. Figure 3: Illustration of the feeling of anxiety – Storm (Feinberg, 2020)
4. Figure 4: Illustration of anxious hand gesture – Raised arms (Cacciapuoti, 2020)
5. Figure 5: Word cloud – Schools (Anxiety-eliciting situation)
6. Figure 6: Word cloud – Bad things happen (Anxiety-eliciting situation)
7. Figure 7: Word cloud – Being alone (Anxiety-eliciting situation)
8. Figure 8: Word cloud – Health (Anxiety-eliciting situation)
9. Figure 9: Tree Map – Coping strategies for schools (anxiety-eliciting situation)
10. Figure 10: Tree Map – Coping strategies for bad things happen (anxiety-eliciting situation)
11. Figure 11: Tree Map – Coping strategies for being alone (anxiety-eliciting situation)
12. Figure 12: Tree Map – Coping strategies for health (anxiety-eliciting situation)
13. Figure 13: Tree Map – Coping strategies for diversity (anxiety-eliciting situation)

Chapter 1: Introduction

For centuries, children's picture books have played an integral part in a child's early years. Picture books can be defined as books that use both pictures and texts to tell a story (Kümmerling-Meibauer, 2018). Since the launch of the first children's picture book, *Orbis Sensualium Pictus* (Visible World in Pictures) by John Amos Comenius, in 1658 (Murphy, 2009), many stories and characters from children's picture books have become fond childhood memories that are shared across generations. The popularity of children's picture books is demonstrated through the borrowers' records in the public library system. In 2020, the New York Public Library, the largest public library system in the United States (New York Public Library, 2021), announced its most borrowed books in the system's 125-year history. The list covers plenty of classic children's picture books, including *The Cat in the Hat* (Dr. Seuss, 1957), *Where the Wild Things Are* (Sendak, 1963) and *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* (Carle, 1969).

Picture books are easily accessible and stimulating resources for early childhood education, which help young children learn important cognitive skills, literacy skills, language and emotions (e.g. Chiong & DeLoache, 2013; Dowdall et al., 2020; Garner & Parker, 2018; Liu, 2014; Lobatto, 2002; Zambo, 2007). In addition to scholarly attention, caregivers also recognize the importance of picture books and reading in their children's lives. A publisher-conducted survey on children's picture books found a majority of caregivers (70.4%) indicated that they read to their children at least once every day (Stead, 2021). In a national study that interviewed 1,000 parents of children from six months to six years old, 96% of the

American parents view that reading is “very important” to intellectual development (Rideout et al., 2003).

Picture books are arguably the first type of children’s literature through which young children read and learn about emotions (Nikolajeva, 2018). Among the many themes in children’s picture books, emotions are commonly addressed. Many picture books’ stories center around a child’s encounters and explore the emotions associated with the characters. One prime example that puts a spotlight on emotions is Roger Hargreaves’ *Mr. Men series*. Across the period of 1971 to 2021, the series created numerous characters including Mr. Happy, Mr. Worry, Little Miss Shy and Little Miss Jealous. The series is still publishing new books to this date and its continued popularity may imply the need of discussing emotions in children’s literature.

Children use emotions to understand themselves and others (Denham et al., 2015). Starting from birth, young infants begin to make meaning of themselves, the environment, the people around them and the emotions associated with their encounters (Piaget, 1952; Tronick & Beeghly, 2011). Emotion development, in which young children learn to express, label and regulate their emotions, is a part of holistic early childhood development due to its interconnectivity with cognitive and physical development (Denham et al., 2012). Since infants and young toddlers heavily depend on caring adults to identify and regulate emotions (Frankel et al., 2012; Grolnick, 1998), caregivers and teachers often need to find resources to help children with emotion regulation. On the internet, it is not difficult to find lists of children’s book recommendations for emotion regulation by media outlets (e.g., Canadian

Broadcasting Corporation and New York Times) and professional organizations (e.g., American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Zero to Three).

Among many emotions that children experience, childhood anxiety and fear are well-studied in research literature (Kaiser, 1998; Last et al., 1996; LoBue & Adolph, 2019; Muris, 2007b; Van Hulle et al., 2017). These emotions are common when children feel threatened; for instance, children may feel threatened when they face novel and unfamiliar situations (Steimer, 2002). With an early onset of anxiety disorders at age 11 (Kessler et al., 2005), acquiring emotion regulation skills helps manage excessive negative emotions and prevent maladaptive behaviors (Cicchetti et al., 1991).

Although previous research literature examines how picture books illustrate situations and topics that young children may encounter, such as starting kindergarten, death and funerals, preparing for surgery and parents' gender roles (Anderson & Hamilton, 2005; Malcom, 2011; Phillips & Sturm, 2013; Tunney & Boore, 2013; Cutler & Slicker, 2020), very few studies examine the topic of emotions and picture books (e.g. Flanagan et al., 2013; Garner & Parker, 2018). To my best knowledge, no systematic study has been conducted to analyze the content of picture books in relation to childhood anxiety despite many anxiety-related picture books recommendation are available online. Only one study analyzed the content of expert-recommended picture books to see whether the way emotions are communicated in picture books are consistent with existing research and theories (Garner & Parker, 2018). Specifically for anxiety, one study discussed the coping strategies for the fear of monsters using three picture books targeted at children from 2 to 5 years old

(Maynes, 2020); whereas more studies looked into the effectiveness of using picture books to alleviate or treat childhood anxiety (e.g. Lewis et al., 2014; Noronha & Shanthi, 2015).

Considering the importance of scaffolding emotional development in early childhood, I am particularly interested in picture books that are suitable for 0 to 5 years old. Specifically, I am curious about the portrayal of anxiety in picture books published in 2020 because of the spur of anxiety during the pandemic. This study used a qualitative approach to examine the portrayal of anxiety and the use of anxiety-coping strategies in picture books by analyzing both illustrations and texts using a thematic analysis approach. The analysis also took into the account of the cultural background of the authors, providing an in-depth understanding of the commonality and uniqueness of anxiety-coping based on contexts.

This study contributes to the literature by providing an understanding of how picture books educate young children on the common experiences of anxiety. It will expand the knowledge base of the portrayal of emotions, specifically anxiety, in children's picture books. This study will provide information to caregivers, teachers and clinicians on the available content in children's picture books when it comes to teaching anxiety and anxiety-coping. Findings from this study will also inform caregivers, teachers and clinicians on their choice and their use of books based on the types of content available, such as considering to fill the identified gaps, if any, by using other educational materials. Children's books publishers can also reference the findings and identify gaps in their offerings, so that they can diversify the content of anxiety-related picture books.

This study aimed to seek answers to the following questions: (1) How do picture books portray anxiety?, and (2) What are the anxiety-coping strategies introduced in the picture books?

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

Ecological Systems Theory

The significance of studying children's picture books can be explained by Bronfenbrenner's (1977) Ecological Systems Theory. Bronfenbrenner (1977) suggests that child development, including emotional development, is a system of relationships and interactions that are impacted by the surrounding environments. There are five levels of influence in a child's environment and the levels are ordered by the proximity to the child. A child's environment is ordered from the microsystem, which is the closest proximity to the child, followed by mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem. The microsystem often refers to the child's immediate environment. Schools, families and peers are some examples of the microsystem given the direct contact with a child, and the microsystem has a heavy influence on children's understanding and beliefs. Since caregivers and schools are the ones who use children's picture books to teach values, emotions and coping strategies, I speculate that children's picture books are also a part of the microsystem to facilitate interaction between adults and children in early childhood.

Zone of Proximal Development

Another reason to study children's picture books is that they serve as an educational tool for scaffolding. The Zone of Proximal Development proposed by Vygotsky (1978) states that children's learning and development can be enhanced by guidance from adults and peers. Vygotsky believed that scaffolding is an important process to help children grow within the zone of proximal development and become independent learners. Shared reading using children's picture books is a valuable

learning opportunity for young children, where caregivers can scaffold children in the process of learning emotions by using positive reinforcement, asking questions, labeling or promoting social interactions by reacting to the story (Vandermaas-Peeler et al., 2009). Children gain awareness and understand emotions through emotion coaching, allowing children to facilitate and regulate their own emotions (Denham et al., 2007)

Emotion Theories

Emotion theories explain what emotions are, how humans experience emotions and why certain emotions arise. Lazarus' (1982) cognitive appraisal theory suggested that a stimulus would trigger a thought, accompanied by a simultaneous physiological response and emotion. With reference to this theory, cognitive appraisal refers to "the way one interprets one's plight at any given moment is crucial to the emotional response" and the elicitation of emotion is closely connected to the cognitive processes (Lazarus, 1982, p.1019). Hochschild (1979) proposed the notion of "feeling rules", stating that norms embedded in the society prescribed how someone should feel in a certain situation and what is considered culturally appropriate. This implies that people from a similar background may share a comparable cognitive appraisal process and experience matching emotions.

The construct of emotions has evolved over time and the interpretation of emotions is not homogenous, but rather a flexible framework (Parrott, 2007). Despite emotions being a popular topic to study, scholars have not reached a consensus on how to define emotions (Mulligan & Scherer, 2012). Widen and Russell (2010) argued that definitions of emotions can be descriptive and prescriptive. A descriptive

definition suggests how the word emotion is used on a day-to-day basis and a prescriptive definition refers to a “scientific concept that is used to pick out the set of events that a scientific theory of emotion purports to explain” (Widen & Russell, 2010, p.377). For this study, I will use Cole and colleagues’ (2004) prescriptive definition. This definition emphasizes that emotions, including anxiety, are adaptive to situations (Cole et al., 2004, p.320):

Emotions are appraisal-action readiness stances, a fluid and complex progression of orienting toward the ongoing stream of experience. Emotions are moving targets that are usually unseen (and unfelt). Emotions must be inferred from evidence of the individual’s relation to the surrounding events.

Apart from the definition of emotions, scholars have also been debating whether emotions are universal. The Basic Emotion Theory (BET) informs plenty of scientific research on the topic of emotions. BET started with Darwin (1872), who studied facial expression in infancy, suggesting that the ability to recognize facial expressions of emotion is innate (Harris, 1998). Following Darwin’s line of work, Ekman (1973) identified six basic emotions, namely happiness, sadness, fear, anger, surprise and disgust and each emotion has a distinctive profile. However, a growing amount of literature argue that the constructionist approaches to emotions should be adopted instead of a universalist approach, stating that the same facial expression could be interpreted differently based on contexts (e.g. Barrett, 2017; Barrett et al., 2019; Gendron et al., 2018). In a conceptual review of emotions, Harris and Cheng (2022) acknowledged that the focus on a few specific emotion expressions is restrictive; yet, they found evidence that the “conceptual progress” of the

understanding of emotions, including the cognitive appraisal of a situation and the related emotions, is similar across cultures (p.1).

Anxiety Theories

Learning Theory

The learning theory suggests that anxiety is a product of learning (Rachman, 2004). With reference to Pavlov (1906) and Watson's theory on learning and conditioning, Eysenck (1957) proposed that anxiety is a conditioned response because a neutral stimulus becomes a conditioned stimulus to elicit the anxious reactions. The theory of conditioning also explains the association between anxiety and avoidance behavior. Mowrer (1960) explained that the engagement in avoidance/ escape behavior contributes to a lower level of anxiety, which strengthens the avoidance/ escape behaviors and keeps the anxiety reactions from extinction. Building upon Mowrer's (1960) theory, Gray (1987) suggested that the punishment occurred after the presentation of a stimuli that triggers anxiety reactions. Gray (1987) explained that a "safety signal" appeared when the anticipated punishment is missed (p.227). This signal helps to reduce the anxiety reaction by serving as a reward for avoidance behavior, indicating to the organism that they can expect freedom instead of punishment. Concurrently, the anxiety reactions are not extinct and they are preserved for "continued potency" (Gray, 1987, p.227). These ideas from the basis of learning theories assumed that any neutral stimulus can be conditioned to elicit an anxiety reaction (Rachman, 2004).

Cognitive Theory

The cognitive theory is based on the idea of cognitive appraisal. Beck and Rush (1985) hypothesized that there is an event that triggered the thought of danger and elicits anxiety. When encountering similar threatening situations, the person's cognition would perceive danger and negative outcomes. Salkovskis (1996) expanded on this notion and stated that "it is the meaning of events that trigger emotions rather than the events themselves" (p.48). Further, the cognitive appraisals would be subjective to context, which refers to the occurrence of the event, a person's mood and a person's past experience. Three stages are involved in the model of anxiety: registration of threat, activation of threat mode and evocation of elaborative checking (Beck & Clarke, 1997; Rachman, 2004). The cognitive theory of anxiety also placed emphasis on the continuity of "normal" and "abnormal" anxiety, as well as the association between cognitions and behaviors (Rachman, 2004, p.68).

Coping Theories

In coping literature, the two key frameworks theorized coping in adulthood (Yeo et al., 2014). According to the stress and coping model developed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), they defined coping as "constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person" (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p.141). Based on this model, coping is seen as a process and an attempt to make changes. The effectiveness of coping is related to the cognitive appraisal of the stressful situation and the use of behavioral coping strategies, but not the outcome. The two types of coping suggested by this model are called problem-focused coping

and emotion-focused coping. Problem-focused coping refers to an individual who manages the stressors/ situations directly. For example, making a study plan for an upcoming test would be considered problem-focused coping. Emotion-focused coping means adjusting and regulating the emotional reactions to a situation (Schoenmakers et al., 2015; Stallard et al., 2001). An example illustrating the concept of emotion-focused coping would be writing down worries in a journal.

Another influential model in the literature is the two-process model by Rothbaum, Weisz and Snyder (1982). This model suggested coping can be categorized as primary control and secondary control. Primary control refers to making direct changes to the situation in the way that an individual prefers, such as requesting extra time to complete a test. As for secondary control, it means adapting to the situation or environment. For instance, setting a lower expectation for a test by aiming at an A-range instead of A+ to manage the potential of feeling upset and discouraged.

Although research in early childhood coping is scarce, studies on preschoolers' categorized coping strategies differently compared to Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) model and Rothbaum, Weisz and Snyder's (1982) framework described above. Blair and colleagues (2004) identified that there are three dimensions of coping among preschoolers based on Eisenberg et al.'s (1993) work: constructive coping, passive coping and emotional venting. In this classification, constructive coping is referred to as "using cognitive problem-solving strategies," passive coping refers to "avoidance and/ or denial of the problem" and emotional venting is defined as an "emotional release of frustration" (Blair et al, 2004, p.424).

Based on Children's Coping Scale-Revised, Yeo and colleagues (2014) derived three dimensions of coping that are similar to Blair et al.'s (2004): positive coping, negative coping–emotion expression and negative coping–emotion inhibition. The positive coping dimension covers problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, primary-control coping and secondary-control coping. Being hopeful about a situation and watching TV to forget about the problem are examples of positive coping. Yeo and colleagues (2014) pointed out that preschoolers, unlike adults, do not show clear dichotomies of problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping, as well as primary-control coping and secondary-control coping, meaning that strategies that can be identified as one category, e.g. secondary-control coping in adults, becomes undifferentiable with its contrast, i.e. primary-control coping. In terms of negative coping, it can be further differentiated into two categories: emotional expression (e.g. crying) and emotional inhibition (e.g. “do nothing”), which are mainly emotion-focused coping (Yeo et al., 2014, p.94). This categorization is similar to Blair's (2004). However, Yeo and colleagues (2014) pointed out that their dimensions are based on empirical findings and Blair et al.'s (2004) are created based on literature.

Another different categorization of coping was suggested by Zimmer-Gembeck and Skinner (2008) as they studied coping in adolescents. Tsurutani (2009) adopted Zimmer-Gembeck and Skinner's categorization when studying preschool children and classified coping strategies as active, passive and relational. When children are taking initiative to manage a situation or emotion, it is considered active coping. Passive coping refers to children who managed distress by avoidance, such as

a child who is afraid of darkness may choose not to switch off the lights when they go to bed. When children involve other people to handle a stressful situation, it is regarded as relational coping.

In summary, picture books are frequently used by caregivers and teachers, making picture books a part of a child's immediate environment. With reference to the ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), it means that picture books are a part of the microsystem and it has a strong influence on child development due to the direct interaction. At the same time, picture books also play a role in scaffolding children as they learn new concepts, such as emotions. The eliciting of anxiety, like all emotions described in the emotion theories, involves the process of cognitive appraisals. While the understanding and interpretation of anxiety may differ slightly from one culture to another, there are also some shared elements of anxiety across cultures. Furthermore, anxiety can be explained by learning theories and cognitive theories. Anxiety can be seen as a form of conditioning, which is triggered by stimuli. At the same time, anxiety can also be elicited from cognitive appraisals and linked to a thought related to danger. As for coping, it is a process that directly make changes to meet external or internal demands. For the purpose of this study, I chose to use Zimmer-Gembeck and Skinner's categorization and identified coping strategies as active, passive or relational.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

Children's picture books provide plenty of information related to emotion regulation. It is important to explore the representation of anxiety in children's picture books to see how anxiety is being conceptualized and what kind of anxiety-coping strategies are demonstrated. In this literature review section, I will first review the literature on emotional development in early years. Next, I will operationalize the construct of anxiety, provide a characterization of this emotion, including physiological manifestation and anxiety-eliciting situations, and discuss anxiety-coping in early childhood based on the literature. Lastly, I will present the rationales for using picture books to help children learn about anxiety and anxiety-coping.

Emotion Development in Early Years

The significance of early emotional development is reflected in the sustainable development goals of the United Nations (United Nations, 2015). The early years of children, specifically the period from birth to age five are identified as a “window of opportunity” to address and promote children's emotional well-being (Black et al., 2017; Nores & Barnett, 2010; Denboba et al., 2014). Optimal learning can occur during this critical period of development given the plasticity of young children's brains (Perry, 2001); while children's early experience, including their interactions with adults, also plays a role in the growth and development of the architecture of children's brains (Shonkoff & Garner, 2012). Based on this evidence from neuroscience, reading children's picture books with caregivers serves as an ideal learning opportunity for healthy development.

Children as young as infancy display signs of emotional competence (Thompson, 1998). Emotional competence is a form of self-efficacy that allows children to uphold functional capability and achieve their goals when they face an emotion-eliciting situation (Saarni, 1999). From two to five years of age, children demonstrate many changes in their emotional competence (Denham, 1998). For example, children begin to gain a better understanding of the causal effect related to emotions as they start kindergarten (Denham, 1998). According to Denham and colleagues (2003), emotional competence consists of social competence, emotion knowledge and emotion regulation. Considering the nature of children's picture books, the constructs of emotion knowledge and emotion regulation are the most relevant when it comes to teaching emotions through stories. Children's picture books can be effective in promoting emotion knowledge by introducing emotion words and connecting emotions with situations. Children can also learn emotion regulation by looking at examples of how children's picture books demonstrate emotion-coping strategies.

Emotion Knowledge

For preschool children, emotion knowledge refers to their ability to accurately identify emotions, label emotions and make connections with emotions and the relevant situation (Bassett et al., 2012). At the age of two, children are able to use language to talk about positive emotions (e.g. by saying "feeling good," "feeling better" and "feeling love") and share negative emotions (e.g. by saying "feeling fear" and "feeling angry") (Wellman et al., 1995). Although children are expressing their emotions verbally, Wellman et al. (1995) did not go into details about which specific

emotions children were able to label at that age. In this developmental period, children can also distinguish between happiness and negative emotions (Bassett et al., 2012). Children are not only able to talk about their own emotions, but they are capable of identifying others' emotions (Bassett et al., 2012; Wellman et al., 1995). For instance, young children describe the feelings of their stuffed animals as they play. In order to identify emotions, children need to make sense of an emotional experience and consider the relevant goals associated with the emotions (Saarni & Harris, 1989). Past academic literature showed that children have the ability to associate emotions with situations. Picture books are some valuable resources that children can use to learn how to label emotions and emotion-eliciting situations.

Emotion Regulation

Emotion regulation is one of the most important skills in child development since early emotional behaviors predict affective skills in adulthood (Cicchetti et al., 1991). The operating definition of emotion regulation varies in the scholarly literature (e.g., Gross, 1998, Thompson, 2011). A broad interpretation of emotion regulation is a psychological process that involves the change of emotions (e.g., Cole et al., 2004). From an interpersonal perspective, emotion regulation is seen as a way for an individual to attain a desirable emotional state (Campos et al., 2011); whereas those who take a relational approach suggest that emotion regulation is an adaptation for managing conflicting goals (Eisenberg & Spinrad, 2003; Campos et al., 2011). In this study, I will adopt the definition of an interpersonal perspective, given that picture books often teach children how to change uncomfortable emotions to comfortable emotions.

Gross (1998) proposed a process model that describes the dynamics of the emotion regulation process. The five forms in the model are situation selection, situation modification, attention deployment, cognitive change and response modulation. In this model, emotion regulation only happens when there is a goal and it is not needed all the time (Gross, 2014). Past research that studied emotion regulation strategies often classifies those strategies into adaptive and maladaptive (e.g. Appleton et al., 2013; Aldao et al., 2014; Conklin, 2015). Adaptive emotion regulation refers to an individual's ability to regulate emotions in a flexible and successful manner, in which individuals adopt different emotion regulation strategies based on the demands of the situation and personal characteristics (Aldao et al., 2015; Kobylńska & Kusev, 2019; Borelli, et al., 2021). Meanwhile, Bridges et al. (2004) argued that all emotion regulation can be adaptive if it helps individuals to function in an environment, but being unable to adapt to the changing environment flexibly suggests maladaptive emotion regulation (dysregulation).

Emotion regulation begins at a young age. At about two to three years old, children's cognitive and language abilities develop and that contributes to the advancement of emotion regulation skills (Kopp, 1989 as cited in Spinrad et al., 2004). Consistent with Kopp's notion of child development, a study showed that five-year-old children adopt more effective self-regulation skills than two-year-olds in a fear-provoking situation (Morales et al., 2018). Assistance from adults is often necessary in order to help young children manage their emotions (Garner, 2010). Caregivers and teachers often serve as "coaches" to scaffold young children's emotional development (Cole et al., 2004; Bassett, et al., 2012). A similar notion was

demonstrated in the results of a longitudinal study (Spinrad et al., 2004). When researchers observed mother-toddler pairs during an emotion-eliciting situation (i.e. a frustrating toy removal task), mothers attempted to regulate children's emotions more when children were at 30 months, compared to the time when the children were 18 months (Spinrad et al., 2004). This suggests that caregivers leverage children's increasing cognitive and language abilities to model and regulate children's emotions. Instruction, explanation of the cause of emotions, modeling, discussion of emotions (discourse) and play are some common strategies that parents used to teach emotion regulation skills (Denham et al., 2010). Picture books may include some of these strategies in the story, making it handy for caregivers and teachers to discuss emotion regulation with children.

Anxiety

Definition

Anxiety is a tense and unsettling emotion related to a potentially threatening situation, creating a puzzling feeling (Rachman, 2004). It involves a range of cognitive processes such as perception, reasoning, attention and memory (Rachman, 2004). From an evolutionary view, anxiety elicits an adaptive response in order to prepare organisms to cope with danger in an environment (Gutiérrez-García & Contreras, 2012). The function of anxiety is to promote alertness and enhance the chance of survival (Gutiérrez-García & Contreras, 2012). It is a normal, protective emotion among children and adults (Huberty, 2010; Gutiérrez-García & Contreras, 2012). Anxiety can also be described as “a state of heightened vigilance rather than an emergency reaction” (Rachman, 2004, p.3).

Beginning in infancy, children may experience anxiety on the spectrum from mild to severe (Beesdo et al., 2009). In general, children are more likely to experience anxiety than adults because they constantly encounter novel situations in an unfamiliar world and their security is largely dependent on adults (Yale Medicine, 2021). Walter Cannon coined the phrase “fight or flight” to capture the essence of anxiety as an emergency response to a threat (Breathnach, 2002). Recent literature adopts an expanded terminology — the “Fight-Flight-Freeze System,” also known as the FFFS (Jones & Monfils, 2016; Maack et al., 2015; Thompson et al., 2014). When a threat is perceived, anxiety will trigger the FFFS to fight the danger, avoid the risk by fleeing or freezing to reduce attention (De Pascalis et al., 2019). Although the signs of anxiety and anxiety disorders are similar, adaptive anxiety symptoms will fade away once the dangerous stimulus disappears (Gutiérrez-García & Contreras, 2012).

Characteristics

Worry is a major characteristic of anxiety. It refers to excessive concern about the anticipation of uncertainty (Huberty, 2004). Some physiological signs of worry include muscle tension, trembling, pounding heart, feeling sick in the stomach, sleep problems, shortness of breath, tiredness, irritability, flushing of the skin and difficulty in concentration (Rachman, 2004). In a study in Australia asking teachers about the signs of anxiety in primary school children, they noted behavioral signs that align with research literature including perfectionism, shyness, avoidance behavior, separation issues, adjustment issues, the need for reassurance and issues in a social relationship (Headley & Campbell, 2013). Additionally, Harrigan and O’Connell

(1996) studied the facial expression of anxiety and found that their participants showed features of fear expression and facial movement when experiencing anxiety. For example, there are tensions in the lips, pulling movement of the mouth and the brows are raised and drawn together. They also noted that some participants showed a “nonenjoyment smile”, potentially as a way to mask or alleviate the negative affect brought by anxiety (Harrigan & O’Connell, p.211).

The Relations Between Anxiety, Fear and Worry

Fear

The negative affect of anxiety is similar to fear in many ways, so anxiety and fear are often used interchangeably (Rachman, 2004). Similarly, these two emotion words are used as synonyms by children’s books authors and libraries when describing an emotion that protects the individuals from threat (Muris et al., 2005; Muris, 2007a; Warren, 2004); yet some literature considers fear and anxiety as two distinctive concepts (Craske, 2003; Steimer, 2002). The major difference between anxiety and fear is that anxiety is a response to an unknown danger or internal struggle, whereas fear is triggered by a known, imminent, external threat (Craig et al., 1995, as cited in Steimer, 2002). The uncertainty involved in anxiety prepares individuals to cope with future, stressful events (Barlow, 2000).

Based on the threat imminence model proposed by Fanselow and Lester (1988), Craske (2003) suggests that anxiety and fear fall on the same continuum and are differentiated by the proximity to threat. In the context of natural environment threats, the continuum starts from “no predatory potential,” followed by “predatory potential,” “predator detected,” “predator makes contact” and “predator makes to kill”

(Fanselow & Lester, 1988). Anxiety is elicited as a defense prior to the encounter of danger (predatory potential); while fear is evoked by a stimulus and it ranges from “predator detected” to the end of the spectrum, depending on the imminence of threat (Craske, 2003, p.23). In other words, anxiety will turn into fear as an individual is more stimulated and exposed to the threat (Muris, 2007a). The threat imminence model explains the functionality of anxiety in an adaptive and non-pathological way. The concept of adaptive anxiety described in this model will guide the definition of anxiety in this study.

Childhood fears typically peak at 4 to 5 years of age and will be outgrown at about 8 years of age, in which fearful responses may appear occasionally and the fearful emotion will not disrupt everyday life (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2010). As children grow older, children get better at predicting the environment and develop a sense of control (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2010). Having control may help reduce fear in young children (Gunnar-von Gnechten, 1978). In a past study that examined 1-year-olds’ reactions to a fear-inducing toy, infants in the sample showed fearful reactions by crying when presented the toys; yet, those infants were smiling and laughing at the toy as they were able to control the toy (Gunnar-von Gnechten, 1978). Despite the reduction of severity in fear as children grow, children who experience a high level of fear in early childhood have an increased risk of anxiety disorders later in life (Van Hulle et al., 2017).

Worry

Apart from fear, worry is another emotion that is closely associated with anxiety. Constant and uncontrollable worry are key features of anxiety (Rachman, 2004). Worry is common among children and about 60% of children reported the feeling worry from time to time (Muris et al., 2002). The major difference between the construct of fear and worry is the presence of threat (Muris et al., 2000). Worry is a thought process associated with fear when actual threat is absent whereas fear occurs when there is a presence of danger (Muris et al., 2000). Kaiser (1998) suggested that anxiety, fear and worry are on the same continuum, ranging from a momentary interference to psychopathology. Anxiety and worry do not differ in negative affect such as confusion and worry, and are more related to problem-solving (Zebb & Beck, 1998). Young children who have not fully developed their problem-solving skills may be more prone to experience worry than adults (Wilson & Hughes, 2011).

While the prevalence of fear will be outgrown, worry tends to increase as children grow (Muris et al., 2002). Muris and their team (2002) studied children from early childhood to early adolescence and they found that the feeling of worry increases from about 50% to 75% when comparing children from 3 to 6 years old and children aged 10 to 14. Children reported that they often worry about the following: death of other people, school performance, personal safety, imaginative creatures and social relationships (Muris et al., 2002; Silverman et al., 1995). While normal worry is typical in childhood, excessive worry is considered an indication of dysfunction, and it is a key feature in different kinds of anxiety disorders (Muris et al., 2002;

Silverman et al., 1995). Anxiety measures are notably linked to childhood worry (Silverman et al., 1995). Further, anxiety and worry measures indicate that anxiety and worry are distinctive even though they are highly correlated (Zebb & Beck, 1998).

Based on the discussed literature, the construct of anxiety is operationalized as a response to threat and danger, covering both known and unknown threats. In other words, the word “anxiety” will cover the basis of both fear and anxiety in this study. I would like to further operationalize the construct of anxiety as the thought process and response to known and unknown threats. That means, the characteristics of anxiety, worry and fear are included in this study by using the label “anxiety.”

Coping With Anxiety

A study in Australia surveyed parents of 4 to 5 year old children using the Children's Coping Scale-Revised, situation-specific coping questions and the Spence Preschool Anxiety Scale to understand anxiety coping of young children (Yeo et al., 2014). The researchers found that anxiety predicts the type of coping strategies that preschool children use. Specifically, children who are anxious tend to use emotion-focused coping. These anxious children are more likely to withdraw when in distress, instead of adopting positive coping to express emotions or find ways to solve problems. Although the researchers of this study made a hypothesis about the correlation between coping patterns and the level of control in a situation, they found their results counter-intuitive since children may not be able to rate the controllability of a situation.

Another study explored coping for children aged 4 to 5. It is found that children can use positive coping strategies (constructive coping) across different levels of anxiety (Pang et al., 2015). For example, children will play, talk to friends and get adults' assistance (Pang et al., 2015). Passive coping such as giving up, doing nothing and having body aches is the least frequently used coping dimension across children with high levels of anxiety and low levels of anxiety (Pang et al., 2015). Children with a high level of anxiety tend to use coping strategies that are emotionally expressive, such as crying, getting angry and blaming themselves (Pang et al., 2015). Pang and colleagues suggested that children in early childhood should learn constructive coping, and to be more adaptive in using negative coping.

Picture Books

Picture books, as the term suggests, are books that contain pictures. Although illustrated books also have both pictures and texts, they are considered to be more text-dominant (Kümmerling-Meibauer, 2018). A broader definition of picture books that align with picture books listed of the publishers includes (1) books that use pictures as the principal element for storytelling, and (2) books that utilize pictures and texts equally to tell the story (Martinez & Harmon, 2012). I will adopt this definition as I discuss picture books in this study.

Due to the unique characteristics of picture books, it is important to consider the word/ picture relationship when conducting an analysis. The words and pictures in picture books have a symmetrical relationship, in which they complement one another by providing additional information (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2000). For example, in Garner and Parker's study (2018) on emotions in picture books, they noticed that only

one picture book showed the words “boo hoo”, a sound that offered clues to a situation, and the words were paired with an illustration of a child’s crying face.

When studying COVID-19-related picture books, the researchers noticed that picture books use anthropomorphism by drawing big eyes and giving a cartoon look to the COVID-19 virus, making it less threatening to children through illustrations.

Picture books are often written for children who are 2 to 5 years old (Cole & Valentine, 2000). The content in picture books is a form of socialization that teaches young children about the real world (Garner & Parker, 2018; Horst & Houston-Price, 2015). Some important topics in everyday life are often covered by picture books: kindergarten experience, poverty, anxiety/ fear, racial justice and climate change (Harper, 2016; Husband, 2019; Kelley & Darragh, 2010; Maynes, 2020; Phillips & Sturm, 2013; Swain, 2020).

Young children are capable of transferring information that they learned from picture books to reality (Ganea et al., 2008). In a study that examined children at 15 and 18 months old, the researchers mimicked picture book reading interaction with young children and taught children a novel labeled “blicket” using picture books with drawings, cartoons or photographs (Ganea et al., 2008). They found that young children are able to learn the novel label and extend its meaning to objects in real life. In addition, the older children in the sample are also capable of generalizing the novel label to a similar object.

Another study illustrated that children do not only learn new labels from children’s picture books, but reading children’s picture books also changes children’s behavior. In a study conducted in the United Kingdom, caregivers of young children

between 19 to 26 months were asked to read a picture book about liked, disliked or unfamiliar food on a daily basis for two weeks (Heath et al., 2009). After that, a laboratory taste test was conducted, where children were presented with a vegetable that they had seen in the picture book and a control vegetable with the same initial status (liked, disliked or unfamiliar) that was not included in the picture book. Children in the sample would try more of the unfamiliar vegetable than the control vegetable if the unfamiliar food was first exposed to the children through picture books (Heath et al., 2009).

Picture Books and emotions

For preschool children, picture books can help them to understand emotions and promote emotional competence (Guo, 2018; Iordanou & Mattock, 2021). Using a popular children's picture book called *Where the Wild Things Are*, 3 to 5 year old children were not successful in identifying anger (14.3%) through the audio book (Iordanou & Mattock, 2021). However, when the researcher presented pictures from the picture book, more than half of the children (52.4%) were able to correctly identify anger, showing that picture books (including both language and pictures) help children recognize emotions.

Researchers provided many explanations showing why picture books are effective in teaching children about emotions and emotion-coping. Characters in picture books provide a context for young children to learn about emotions and emotion regulation in a structured way (Garner, 2010; Zambo, 2007). With the help of a story, preschool children can express their thoughts more easily by identifying with the characters (Akgün & Karaman Benli, 2019; Hansen & Zambo, 2005; Zambo,

2006; Zambo, 2007). The portrayal in picture books also guides children to face their specific challenges by developing an understanding of the character that shared a similar experience (Cole & Valentine, 2000). Moreover, picture books provide insights for children to solve problems and at the same time, children may feel less lonely about their emotional encounters when they read about a similar situation (Cole & Valentine, 2000). Adults can make use of picture books to support the promotion of emotional competence by using read-aloud to introduce emotion words, ask open-ended questions to connect the story to children's experience, discuss emotion expression and explore relevant coping strategies for emotion regulation (Gallingane & Han, 2015).

Regarding emotion-related content in picture books, only one research study was available. Garner and Parker (2018) argued that children's picture books provide emotion-related information for caregivers and teachers to start relevant conversations with children as a form of socialization. They sampled 51 picture books recommended by socioemotional learning experts. The sample is rated by two developmental experts based on six areas, including how emotions are explained, the appeal to different age ranges, cultural stereotypes, imaginative and stimulating content, organization, as well as attractiveness and readability. The rating scale ranges from 1 (not present) to 3 (often present). Garner and Parker (2018) found that the content of those picture books, in terms of the use of emotion words, illustration of emotions and emotion-eliciting situations, are consistent with scholarly studies on early childhood emotional development.

While the portrayal in picture books can help children learn emotions and emotion regulation, researchers found that some children's picture books' content may not provide helpful information; hence, caregivers and teachers need to be sensitive about the content of the book. Oliver and team (1994) evaluated some children's books in the context of bullying and victimization. They found that 32% of the books suggested fighting and taking revenge, and other solutions such as threatening the perpetrators were proposed, which may not be suitable for adults who want to teach non-violent approaches (Oliver et al., 1994). Another similar study on children's literature and bullying found that 25% of the coping strategies identified in children's literature involve revenge-seeking strategies that are proven to be counter-productive (Flanagan et al., 2013).

Anxiety and Picture Books

Given the prominence of anxiety, worry and fear in early childhood, these emotions often serve as the key themes of picture books; however, limited literature explores the learning of anxiety and relevant coping strategies using picture books. Instead, there are a few studies that investigated the representation of coping strategies for childhood fear in picture books (e.g., Maynes, 2020).

One relevant study is related to the fear of monsters. Developmental psychologists identified that even though 4 to 6 year old children know the differences between fantasy and the real world, they may be unsure if imaginative creatures, such as monsters, can become a reality (Harris et al, 1991). Maynes (2020) referenced a few English picture books for children who are 2 to 5 years old to discuss coping strategies for the fear of monsters. Maynes (2020) specifically focused

on three books, namely *Molly and the Night Monster*, *Bedtime for Monsters* and *The Wardrobe Monster*, and he argued that these books showcased coping strategies that are preferred by young children. Positive pretense, which means reducing or eliminating threats (monsters) by changing cognitive thoughts and perception, is the most frequently presented way of coping in the sampled children's picture books (Maynes, 2020).

Mental health professionals such as school psychologists use bibliotherapy to help children understand their emotional issues through reading and sharing books and stories (Heath et al., 2005). This technique has also been used to treat and manage anxiety in children (Akgün & Karaman Benli, 2019). Children with anxiety and fear are able to learn cognitive-behavior skills effectively and delightfully through fictional bibliotherapy (Coffman et al., 2013). Young children benefit from the modeling of thoughts, emotions and behaviors in the story and the story will also serve as a motivation for the child to address the issues they face (Coffman et al., 2013).

Researchers have examined the effectiveness of using picture books or bibliotherapy to alleviate children's anxiety. In India, a quasi-experimental pretest–posttest group design was used to test the effectiveness of using children's picture books to reduce children's anxiety (aged 6 to 12) about upcoming surgical procedures (Noronha & Shanthi, 2015). While children in the control group only received standard medical care, children in the experimental group were provided with picture books that cover preoperative, intraoperative and postoperative interventions, in addition to standard medical care. Twenty-four hours after the surgery, a post-test

result was measured and children in the experimental group were found to have a significantly lower anxiety level than the control group, based on the Hamilton Anxiety Rating scale.

Other studies also confirmed the effectiveness of using picture books to help children cope with fear. In a treatment for nighttime fear, the researchers first conducted an initial assessment, followed by three instructional sessions each week during the 3-week baseline period (Lewis et al., 2015). In the course of 4-weeks, parents were asked to read a picture book called *Uncle Lightfoot, Flip That Switch: Overcoming Fear of the Dark* (Coffman, 2014), to their 5 to 7 year old children with the fear of darkness and sleeping alone. On each day, parents were instructed to read a chapter with their children at night and that they should have read the book twice by the end of the 4 weeks. This treatment with picture books was proven to be effective as children's anxiety symptoms and avoidance behaviors improved within a month. Another study in Greece showed that children had more courage to express their fear of bodily injury, ghosts and darkness after reading relevant literature (Paparoussi et al., 2011). In addition, bibliotherapy is also effective in coping with adjustment for children who were removed from home due to abuse or neglect by parents (Betzalel & Shechtman, 2010).

Picture Books in 2020

This study focuses on analyzing picture books that were published in 2020 based on the following rationales:

First, timely research is needed to inform the selection and use of picture books by caregivers, teachers and clinicians. Although Garner and Parker (2018)

demonstrated that picture books recommended by experts reflect the empirical understanding of emotions, it is unclear how the content of picture books available in the market described anxiety, specifically for their portrayal of anxiety and anxiety-coping. Therefore, the results of this study will shed light on what key themes can be found within the topic of anxiety in new children's picture books that are published in 2020.

When selecting picture books, caregivers think it is important to pick newly published books because of the updated design (Švab & Žumer, 2015). Mental health experts such as counselors said that they often make their choices of books for teaching and therapeutic purposes by reading and making the judgment themselves; whereas some counselors also shared that they choose a book based on their clinical judgment and intuition (Pehrsson & McMillen, 2010). Nevertheless, caregivers may not possess the expert knowledge of mental health professionals when choosing picture books to teach anxiety and anxiety-coping to their young children. Caregivers and teachers who want to use children's picture books to teach anxiety may reference this study and gain an understanding of what anxiety-coping strategies can be found in some of the books that are published in 2020. Further, knowing what content is covered by the picture books also helps caregivers, teachers and clinicians to identify potential gaps in teaching anxiety and anxiety-coping through picture books, so that they can integrate other resources to teach young children, if necessary. Publishing companies will also be able to fill this gap by publishing more books that portray anxiety differently.

Next, the COVID-19 pandemic, covering the year 2020, spurs anxiety. Since the beginning of the pandemic in 2019, many picture books have been published on the topic of the pandemic as a quick response to the global health crisis (Moruzi et al., 2021). During the pandemic, many caregivers had to homeschool their children due to school closure and lockdown. Picture books and other children's literature became accessible education tools for emotional socialization during this unprecedented global health crisis when children and adults experienced high levels of anxiety.

Falcus and Caldwell (2021) analyzed 73 English picture books that were published in 2020, aiming to examine how the COVID-19 pandemic is discussed in picture books. In their sample, children are taught to fight like heroes by “hand washing and staying at home” and the books also portray the anxiety brought by the uncertainty of the pandemic, including how long the pandemic may last (Falcus & Caldwell, 2021). Another similar study conducted by Moruzi and their team (2021) surveyed 30 English picture books using a content analysis approach to understand how public health messages are conveyed in children's books. They drew on examples to show how books used humor to reduce children's anxiety and fear brought on by the pandemic. For example, *The Spooky Shallow Cough* (Rabb, 2020) reminded children to stay 6 feet apart from other people in a way that they cannot smell each other's fart, along with an image of a green fart in between the character and their dog as they dance (Moruzi et al., 2021). The books also addressed children's anxiety, worry and fear by teaching coping strategies, which include drawing feelings, deep breathing, self-talk and visualizing a safe space (Moruzi et al., 2021).

The present study is not limited to COVID-19-related picture books; instead, it examines children's picture books that are published in 2020 as a whole. By doing so, I am going to investigate how anxiety-coping strategies for young children are associated with different types of anxiety-provoking situations.

Chapter 4: Method

Sample

This study used English picture books for children from birth to five that were published in 2020. To ensure that the books used in this study are easily accessible to caregivers, teachers and mental health professionals, I gathered the sample by searching in two major public library systems, namely the Boston Public Library Catalog and Minuteman Library System, in Boston, Massachusetts. The Boston Public Library has 25 branches across the city of Boston, and has a long history of promoting reading and literacy in America. It is the first large free municipal library in the United States (Boston Public Library, 2021). It is also the first public library to lend books to the community and the first to offer a children's room (Boston Public Library, 2021). As for the Minuteman Library System, it is a consortium of over 40 libraries that covers 60 locations in the Metrowest region of Massachusetts (Minuteman Library Network, 2018). Based on the urban and rural classification of the United States Census Bureau (n.d.), these two public library systems combined cover 10 urban and 38 suburban areas.

Given that there is no clear consensus among the researchers on how to distinguish between anxiety, worry and fear despite the attempts by many researchers and theorists (Silverman et al., 1995), I used “anxiety”, “worry” and “fear” as search terms to identify samples from the two selected public library systems in September 2021. I also used the advanced filter search function of the library catalogs to further limit the search by choosing books that are located in the children's library, available in either the format of physical books or e-books, written in English or translated in

English. In addition, I only included books that are categorized as “picture books for children” or “picture books” by the libraries. After consolidating and deduplicating the search results from both library catalogs, I found that 100 books matched the general criteria mentioned above.

Based on the initial search, I further limited the sample to picture books for children aged 0 to 5 years old. This is to ensure that the finding of this study would contribute to the knowledge base of early childhood education and intervention given the importance of critical periods of brain development and their relation to emotion regulation (Hensch & Bilimoria, 2012). I used Amazon, one of the most popular book-selling sites in the United States (Oppliger & Davis, 2016), to determine the reading age of the books for consistency. After screening the reading age of the books, I excluded 13 books from the sample. Although the initial search focused on books that were published in 2020, 5 books were not published in 2020 and were excluded from the sample, resulting in a finalized sample of 82 children’s picture books (See Table 1). This sample size is comparable to other studies on picture book content (e.g. Flanagan et al., 2013; Garner & Parker, 2018; Oppliger & Davis, 2016).

Data Analysis

All 82 picture books were each individually coded and analyzed based on the principles and techniques of Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis. Given the nature of picture books, both texts and illustrations are equally important in telling the story. Although thematic analysis has been widely used for analyzing texts, it can also be used for analyzing visuals (Cohen et al., 2011; Glaw et al., 2017). The coding process was guided by the steps proposed by Nowell et al. (2017), which aimed to

produce trustworthy thematic analysis: (1) familiarize yourself with your data, (2) generate initial codes, (3) search for themes, (4) review themes, (5) define and name themes and (6) produce the report.

Codebook Development

The codebook development adopted a combination of deductive and inductive approaches (Roberts et al., 2019). Starting with a deductive approach, I first consulted with existing literature to answer the research questions and created a preliminary codebook to guide the coding and analysis process. Followed the development of a preliminary codebook, I used the inductive approach to expand the codebook, allowing raw data to provide answers to the research questions. With this mixed approach, I was able to conduct a more comprehensive analysis and capture the unknown that may not be included in the predictive codes from the deductive process (Roberts et al., 2019).

The preliminary codebook was first created using a deductive approach based on the existing literature and measures in an attempt to answer the two research questions. The goal of the first research question “how do picture books portray anxiety” is to identify signs of anxiety and anxiety-eliciting situations. Considering the focus on early childhood and the diverse cultural implication in the sample, I referenced the Preschool Anxiety Scale-Revised (PAS-R), a modification of the Preschool Anxiety Scale (PAS) developed in 1999 (Edwards et al., 2010). This is because the validity of PAS-R was tested by a large sample that consists of 1,182 parents with children from three to five years in Australia (Edwards et al., 2010). The age group covered by this scale matches closely with the targeted demographic of this

study; hence, I speculate that the signs and symptoms covered in this scale would match with what the picture books present to young children below age five.

The original Preschool Anxiety Scale was developed from literature review, diagnostic criteria listed on DSM-III-R and DSM-IV, other anxiety measures for children, structured clinical interviews and the authors' clinical and research experience on the topic (Spence et al., 2001). This parent-report scale was also adapted and translated into 13 languages, such as Arabic, Simplified Chinese and Hebrew (Spence Children's Anxiety Scale [SCAS], 2021). The anxiety symptoms included in the original PAS are related to the subscales for "generalized anxiety, social phobia, separation anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorder, fears of physical injury and obsessive-compulsive disorder" (Spence et al., 2001, p.1297). The items in this scale describe children with anxiety in terms of the events that they experience or behaviors, using a Likert scale from 0 to 4 in which 0 means "not true at all" and 4 refers to "very often true" (Spence & Rapee, 1999). Some examples of items are "has difficulty stopping him/herself from worrying" and "is afraid of dark" (Spence & Rapee, 1999). In the PAS-R, seven items were removed due to the low response rates (Edwards et al., 2010). Three items were updated to provide clarity and nine items were added to cover the wide range of anxiety symptoms, especially on the manifestation of worry (Edwards et al., 2010). Since obsessive-compulsive disorder is no longer considered as anxiety in DSM-5 (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), items related to obsessivity and compulsivity in PAS-R were not added to the preliminary codebook. Through this deductive process, a list of 23 deductive codes

(e.g. constant worrying, irritability, separating from parents) was generated based on this scale.

Another part of the codebook was developed to answer the second research question, “What are the anxiety-coping strategies introduced in the picture books?” The deductive codes were derived from a study on preschoolers’ coping strategies, which interviewed 46 Australian children at the age of four to learn about their coping strategies in fear-eliciting and difficult situations (e.g. darkness, separation from parents) (Chalmers et al., 2011). I chose to adapt the finding of Chalmer et al.’s (2011) study in the codebook because there were only a few studies that explore coping strategies among preschoolers and the coping strategies identified were suggested by children. This study classified coping strategies into productive coping (e.g. self-reliant, think positive, calm down and ignore problem) and non-productive coping (e.g. do nothing, cry and tantrum). This classification is different from the categorization that I adopted for this study, which is based on Zimmer-Gembeck and Skinner’s (2008) work. Chalmers et al.’s study offered an empirical understanding of young children’s coping, and their study and I speculate that picture books are able to capture some children’s reality and reflect the coping strategies that children would use. Hence, Chalmers et al.’s work was used for codebook development and 12 deductive codes - including both productive and non-productive coping strategies - were added to the preliminary codebook. These codes include “think positive”, “do nothing”, “cry” and “seek comfort”. These coping strategies will be re-categorized based on Zimmer-Gembeck and Skinner’s (2008) study once they are grouped into themes during data analysis.

Next, the inductive approach is used. The initial codes in the preliminary codebook were used by all the coders for independent coding. New codes are added and existing codes were refined along the coding process. When adding new codes, the research team upheld an open-minded approach and used proximal language based on the sample. Given that the deductive codes created in PAS-R were mostly related to an anxiety-eliciting situation, the inductive process not only added more anxiety-eliciting situations to the codebook (15 codes) but also expanded the codebook by adding codes related to the externalization of anxiety (17 codes). Five second-level codes were also added to further refine the deductive codes obtained from the PAS-R. To answer the second research question, 9 second-level codes were created to refine the deductive codes derived from Chalmer et al.'s (2011) study. Twelve first-level codes and 4 second-level codes were also added. Besides, the research team agreed to add codes on gender, race and nature of the main character to enrich the analysis, which accounts for 12 codes. The inductive and iterative process generated a total of 74 preliminary codes for the codebook.

Coding

The research team used the NVivo software (release 1.6.1) to facilitate the independent coding of the texts and illustrations in all 82 picture books. The research team consists of three graduate students and two undergraduate students. Two graduate students, including myself, and two undergraduate students were coders. Another graduate student who is familiar with the project and subject matter served as a peer reviewer to provide feedback on the codebook and coding process. The coding team, along with the peer reviewer, had weekly team meetings on Zoom, a virtual

conferencing software, to develop a shared understanding of the codes and refined concepts of the codes.

The coding process started with an agreement establishment phase in January 2022. The team first coded eight books (10%) independently and performed a coding comparison. Among these eight books, three books were generated from the search term “anxiety”, two books related to “worry” and three books on “fear”. Cohen’s kappa was used to determine the interrater agreement during this coding process. Cohen’s kappa is a chance-corrected measure that “assess[es] agreement beyond that which occurred by chance” (Dettori & Norvell, 2020). The kappa statistic was generated by NVivo and it ranged from -1 (no agreement) to 1 (perfect agreement) (NVivo, n.d.). According to a commonly used kappa interpretation scale developed by Altman (1991), kappa of 0.61 to 0.80 is good, and 0.81 to 1 is considered very good. After the first round of coding in the agreement establishment phase, the total average kappa, including both text and illustrations, of all 8 books across the team reached .92. It falls under the range of very good agreement among the coders (Altman, 1991). For the range of kappa of each book, it ranges from .84 to .98, which is also in the very good range (Altman, 1991). Once the agreement was established, the sample was divided among the coders to code independently.

In order to enhance the validity of this study, the coders were assigned to check one of their peer’s independent coding after the entire sample was coded. The team discussed the experience of checking each other’s coding and the coders agreed that their peers are similarly using the codes as themselves, in line with the high interrater agreement in the agreement establishment phase. Besides, the coders also

engaged in memo writing throughout the coding process to reflect on their coding experiences, potential biases and understanding of the samples. Each coder also wrote analytic memos on themes that emerged from the 82 picture books, forming an outline of the findings.

Researcher Reflexivity

The members of the team all had experience working with children and/or youth and they are studying Education, Psychology or School Psychology. The author is a doctoral student in school psychology, who has experience of developing interventions on shared reading and teaching socioemotional skills. She is an Asian woman and an international student from Hong Kong. Another member of the team is a Latina American woman from the U.S. Southeast. She is also a doctoral student in school psychology. She is studying anger in children's picture books and worked in an elementary school classroom for three years. The third team member is a former elementary school teacher and she is working towards a master's degree in human development and education. She is a White American woman from the U.S. Midwest. The fourth member is an undergraduate student in family science. She is a biracial (White and Pakistani) American woman from the U.S. Southeast. The last team member is an undergraduate student who studied psychology and public health. He is a transracially adopted Vietnamese American man.

With our shared understanding of education and psychology, each member of the team brings in their own identities and cultural perspectives, which allowed us to develop a comprehensive understanding and interpretation of the sample. As a team, we constantly remind each other to practice cultural humility by being open-minded

and not making any assumptions based on our background and cultural understanding (Fisher, 2020). We conducted an internet search to identify the country of publication, as well as the authors' and illustrators' country of origin, residence and background, which helped us to contextualize the stories. Our collective cultural experience helped us interpret the picture book texts and illustrations through different lenses.

In order to engage with other practitioners in the field, I joined a few social media community groups and listserv, in which I notice teachers and clinicians asking for book recommendations for teaching and counseling. This gave me the impression that there is a demand for using books to help children learn emotions. During my practicum in an elementary school, I was working with a teacher to help with a student's anxiety. We were told by the caregivers that the student's anxiety was stemmed from perfectionism and that reminded me of a book in this sample called *The Magical Yet*. I introduced this book to the teacher and she decided to read it with the class during the socioemotional learning period. I also acquired some hard copies of the books in my sample and I gifted the *Breathing Book* to my site supervisor. She told me that she has been using the book in her counseling session to practice deep breathing as a coping strategy. All these real-life experience help me think further as I interpret my findings and draw a conclusion for this study. I became more aware of the art of choosing and using a picture book in promoting children's mental health. It involves picking a book that is relevant to the student and using our professional knowledge to make use and supplement the content with the students' best interest in mind.

Chapter 5: Findings

A vast majority of the books in this sample (n=62 out of 82, 75.6%) are published by American publishers and other publishers are based in the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Hong Kong, Australia, Canada, Spain and Germany. While about 60% of the sample (n=50) authors and illustrators are from the United States and the United Kingdom, some other authors and illustrations are from and/or reside in many different parts of the world (in alphabetical order): Australia, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Dominican Republic, European countries (Czech Republic, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Switzerland), Iran, Japan, Malaysia, Romania, Spain and Turkey. Overall, the diversity among the authors and illustrators are larger than the publishers.

Additionally, some books are published by an author or illustrator who has a professional background in psychology or education. Among all 82 books, nine books were written by an author with a background in psychology or mental health, such as a psychologist, counselor and therapist, or published by the American Psychological Association. Twelve authors and/ or illustrators identified themselves as a teacher or educator, and there is also a book published by a speech-language pathologist. In addition, nine books in the sample included a parent note providing guidance to parents on how to use and interpret the story, and only one of these nine books was published by a professional.

This sample covered a wide range of stories. Although all of these books were found using the search term “anxiety”, “worry” and “fear”, the coding team found a few books that were not related to these emotions, or the theme of anxiety is not as

strongly presented as others. Some books focused on presenting coping strategies without specifically relating the narrative to anxiety or anxiety-eliciting situations. In terms of protagonists, half of the sample used a person. There is some degree of diversity in the picture books given that the characters in the stories may be of different skin colors. While the coding team refrained from identifying the characters' race and ethnicity purely based on skin color, we noticed some black and brown protagonists in these stories. The second-most common type of protagonists are animals, and fictional characters such as personified objects and creatures (e.g. Elmo) are the least common.

Given that more than half of the sample is created by American authors and illustrators, there is some degree of Euro-centrality displayed in the sample. Such Euro-centric representation is noticeable in the illustration, such as the architectural style of the house and the appearance of the street. Stories that are staged in the school setting appeared to have a stronger connection to the White American and/ or European cultures. Depictions of having carpet time, having a small class size and doing show-and-tell may not be common in other cultures. The degree of Euro-centrality in the sample is also related to the protagonists. For stories that use animals as protagonists, the setting is often outdoor, showing illustrations of green areas and dark skies at night. These culture-reduced stories that use nature as a setting may be more relatable to children of different cultures.

Question 1: How Do Picture Books Portray Anxiety?

Signs and Symptoms of Anxiety

Constant worrying is a major theme across these books that helps characterize anxiety. Many stories use multiple questioning to present this characteristic. The “what if” questions are used across different books in this sample to present worrying thoughts. The book *The Worrysaurus* describes the thoughts that were in the protagonist’s mind as follows (Bright, 2020, p.8-9):

Before his busy head dreamed up some things that might go wrong... Had he made enough to eat today? And brought enough to drink? This Worrysaurus often was a one to overthink. “What if I get lost?” he thought, “or trip and have a fall?”

While some worrying thoughts may be reasonable and plausible, most protagonists in the stories engage in catastrophic thinking. This means the protagonists only thought about negative outcomes or even the worst possible situations. For example, in *The Little Girl Who Was Afraid Of Everything* (Cacciapuoti, 2020), the protagonist, Ami, worried that she would be stroked by thunder and lightning if she takes a walk with her grandma and she justified her thoughts by saying “anything could happen”.

The worrying thoughts are not only depicted in words, but they are also shown in the illustrations. The most frequently used imagery for worrying thoughts is a creature that follows the main characters around. Some books used scary-looking creatures to represent negative thoughts, such as monsters and zombies; while there are a few books that used neutral-looking creatures. For example, in the book *Whatifs* (Kilgore & Persico, 2020), those creatures are called the Whatifs. The Whatifs follow the protagonist everywhere and they are described as “[h]eavy, lumpy and grumpy, the Whatifs are everywhere; in a bright room, sand dark corners, in busy hallways and

hushed libraries in big cities and small towns” (p.3). Unlike the monsters and zombies that are often illustrated in dark colors, the Whatifs are in bright colors, such as red, blue, orange and purple, and they have wings to fly with. Besides creatures, the worrying thoughts were also visualized as balloons and strings. The book *Love* (Averiss, 2020) used a ball of string to connect a mother and a daughter during their separation. When the daughter did not see her mom at the school gate, she started to worry and the string grew longer and messier on the page (See Figure 1).

This sample also presents a wide variety of externalization and the most prominent feature of the externalization of anxiety is an anxious face (See Figure 2) in the illustration. The occurrence of an anxious face was found in slightly more than half of the sample. The coding team identified the following features of an anxious face: eye brows drawn together, widened eyes, an opened mouth with or without teeth, corner of the mouth pointing downwards. Crying also was presented as an expression of anxiety. For instance, Feinberg (2020) depicts worry as a storm in the body (See Figure 3).

Apart from the face, picture books in this sample also suggested several visible signs of anxiety related to the body. The illustrations in the picture books showed different hand and arm gestures made by the protagonists, such as raising arms (See Figure 4) putting both hands by the mouth, and using a hand to hold the chin/ head. Some anxious protagonists also tried to make some movements of the limbs, for example, kicking foot; while other protagonists were shaky, jumpy and shivery. Pacing, biting on objects and making nervous utterances (e.g. gulp, sigh, oh dear) were other anxious behaviors that were noted in the books.

Anxiety also brought different physiological symptoms that were uncomfortable to the protagonists. A fluttering stomach, more commonly known as a butterfly in the stomach, was frequently presented as a sign of anxiety. The picture books described this discomfort by stating that the stomach “swoosh and swirl” (Cruz, 2020, p.4), “tied up in knots” (Owen, 2020, p.10) and “full of wiggly worms” (Julian, 2020, p.15). A few other physiological signs that were mentioned or illustrated in the stories were racing heart, a buzz in the ear, no appetite, sick, hard to breathe and insomnia.

Among these stories, the narrative showed that the protagonists recognized their emotions before coping happened. Some protagonists were able to label their emotions by stating “why am I so anxious?”, “Am I nervous? About the first day of school? I mean... sure” (John, 2020); whereas other protagonists described their feelings. For example, a book noted that the feeling of “red-hot anger” is possible (Feinberg, 2020, p.17).

Anxiety-eliciting Situations

Five key themes were identified among the anxiety-eliciting situations presented in the sample: bad things happen, school, being alone, health and diversity. All these themes shared the notion of either novelty or unfamiliarity, which are likely to trigger anxiety for most children. These identified anxiety-eliciting situations typically served as the major narratives of the stories and some books contain multiple themes in a story. As the story progresses, the tension of the stories intensified, and the problem-solving process of the protagonists was often demonstrated.

School was the most common theme in the sample, accounting for about 35% of the sample. It covers children's experience in school and group activities. Many stories suggested that children can be anxious about the first day of school for a variety of reasons, such as being in a new place, being separated from their parents, not being able to find the classroom, not knowing anyone in the school, being late for school and so on. A majority of these books stressed the novelty of the first day of school, such as *Norman's First Day at Dino Day Care* (Julian, 2020), *School is Coming* (Aubert & Leblanc, 2020) and *First Day Critter Jitters* (John, 2020). Apart from the word "school", words associated with nervousness (3%) and worry (3%) frequently appeared in this theme, which highlighted the protagonists' emotions about going to school (See Figure 5).

Additionally, the stories related to schools depicted test anxiety, in which the protagonists worried about not doing well or even failing. The protagonist, Rija, in *The Secret Words* demonstrated test anxiety by having an overwhelming thought "I can't do it" (Anglim, 2020, p.7). The contrast between the comfort at home and the novelty at school was also highlighted, in which a book in the sample indicated that the protagonist, Raj, "never use[s] the bathroom at school" and they would only use the bathroom at home. Raj explained, "[t]hat's the only bathroom I know" (Button, 2020, p.2). Besides, school was depicted as a social environment where social anxiety was prominent within the school setting. Some stories pointed out that the anxiety stemmed from the concern of being laughed at, speaking and performing in public, being excluded from activities and not knowing anyone in school.

The second-most common theme in this sample is bad things happen, accounting for 32% of the sample. This theme is closely related to catastrophic thinking where the protagonists are worried about the unfavorable outcome arising in a situation. Apart from using words such as “bad things happen” (e.g. Owen, 2020, p.6), some books convey a similar idea by stating “anything could happen” (e.g. Cacciapuoti, 2020, p.4). Words related to darkness (5%) and feeling scared (2.1%) appeared most frequently (See Figure 6). Darkness, thunder, bugs, monsters, zombies and heights are some threats presented by books that contain these themes. The stories rarely confirmed that the threats were real except for the indication of sound; rather, the threats were mostly thoughts in the protagonists’ minds and the protagonists were not close to being harmed. For example, in the *Tiny T. Rex and the Very Dark Dark*, Tiny and Pointy had their first camping trip in the backyard and they worried about “crawly-creeps”, “grumbles” and “nom-bies” (Stutzman, 2020, p.7 & p.9). When the story said, “the very dark dark has got us” (Stutzman, 2020, p.32), the illustration showed Tiny and Pointy’s eyes in the darkness, meaning that there were no other creatures or threats. The story ended by showing both Tiny and Pointy looking at a starry night in the camp.

The third theme that emerged in the sample is being alone and covers 24% of the sample. It refers to being alone or having to face unfamiliar events alone. Some stories with this theme highlighted the attachment between caregivers and children, using phrases such as “I want mommy to hold me” (Eudes-Pascal, 2020, p.27), “I want to be with my mom and my dad” (Higgins & Bekish, 2020, p.6). This notion parallels with the frequently used words, including home (4%), hold (4%) and

mummy (3%), identified in these stories (See Figure 7). This theme also included situations where the protagonists were facing unfamiliar situation or worrying about bad things that would happen. For example, there is an immigrant story about a Korean family where the father worked overseas and he was rarely home. The protagonist, June, is worried that their “father will never come home” (Jung, 2020, p.27).

Metaphors are commonly used to present this theme. *The Last Loose Tooth* (Burke, 2020) is a story about the process of losing baby teeth. A tooth was featured as the protagonist and it was anxious about leaving the mouth. Further, the life of a plant is a recurring topic in this theme. These stories focused on the journey of a leaf or a seed as they were leaving the tree in the story. When a leaf described its anxiety of falling from the tree and the feeling of uncertainty, some associated negative thoughts included “getting stuck on a windshield” (Wade, 2020, p.18) and “don’t want to bump my head” (Grant, Grant & Liddiard, 2020, p.3). Another story demonstrated that it was hard for the tree to see the seed leaving:

The tiny seed didn’t leave. The tree kept it close, watching over it, worrying over what would happen if it went off to Who Knows Where. The tree and the seed were both afraid of that (Valentini & Giordano, 2020, p.16)

Furthermore, health (16%) was one of the themes that were featured in the sample and this theme concerns both physical and mental health. In terms of physical health, related books are all related to COVID-19 and they only covered less than 5% of the sample. Among these books, they shared the concern of getting sick from contracting COVID-19 and providing preventative suggestions. However, not all

these books directly named COVID-19 and only one book directly stated coronavirus or “crown-wearing virus” (Cavallo, 2020). Another book mentioned COVID-19 in the foreword, but the story only used euphemisms such as “bad things happened in the world”. This is reflected by the words that are frequently used under this theme, such as worried (3%), flu (2%), ill/ sick (2%), virus (2%) and discovered (2%) (See Figure 8). Other books have characters that were wearing masks, practicing social distancing and mention “virus going around” (Alber, 2020, p.3), which can be related to COVID-19 given that the books were published in 2020.

In addition, three out of 14 books coded with this theme (21%) were related to mental health. These stories illustrated the experience of anxiety for someone whose daily functioning might be impacted by psychological concern or mental illness.

Wanda’s Words Got Stuck (Rowland, 2020), a book written by a speech-language pathologist, presents a story of a young witch who has difficulties speaking due to shyness and anxiety. The author of *Juan Has The Jitters* (Cruz, 2020) stated that the book was about a boy with autism and he clapped even when he was not excited. There was also a book that involved a mother with bipolar disorder, *Up And Down Mom* (Maçon, 2020), illustrating the anxiety and uncertainty faced by the child.

The last theme for anxiety-provoking situations is diversity (11%), which featured stories with traditions or experiences of a specific cultural group, including Jewish, Asian American, Latin American, gay parents and drag. *Night Lights: A Sukkot Story* (Goldin, 2020) is a story about staying in a sukkah during the Jewish Harvest Festival. According to the story, this tradition was to remember how their ancestors “wandered in the desert for forty years and slept in temporary shelters” as

they left Egypt (Goldin, 2020, p.5). It provided unique contextual information about the anxiety of sleeping outside that is distinctive from other stories on staying out in the dark. Another example illustrating this theme is Sarah Jung's (2020) *When Father Comes Home*, where the father of the story was illustrated as a goose while the rest of the family was portrayed in human form. In Korean, the term "goose dad" (*gireogi appa*) refers to a migrant father who stayed apart from the family and traveled to Korea for work in order to provide for the family (Jung, 2020). This story captured children's anxiety about separating from parents in the context of an immigrant family.

Although the identified themes do not overlap in their definition, some stories touched upon more than one theme in the narrative. For instance, in Sesame Workshop's *Heroes Wear Masks* (Jane, 2020), Elmo being anxious about going to school was the major narrative. Although the book did not specifically mention COVID-19 or identify any emotions related to COVID-19, both texts and illustrations of the story demonstrated COVID-19-related precautions in which Elmo's mom reminded Elmo about social distancing, handwashing and mask-wearing. Similarly, *Juan Has The Jitters* (Cruz, 2020) covered the theme of health and school, and *When Father Comes Home* (Jung, 2020) is related to both diversity and separation.

Question 2: What are the anxiety-coping strategies introduced in the picture books?

A variety of coping strategies were introduced by the picture books in this sample and five themes emerged (See Table 2). The largest theme was finding comfort (74%), followed by inhibiting emotions (49%), solving problems (46%), recognizing and expressing emotions (22%) and cultural-specific strategies (1%).

Finding comfort is a theme that was identified in more than half of the sample (74%). It refers to using resources to gain a sense of relief, deescalate heightened emotions and alleviate anxiety. Among all the coping strategies found under this theme, the two relational strategies that involve external help from other persons appeared the most in the sample — getting reassurance from others (34%) and physical touch and presence (30%). Parents and friends are typically the protagonists' go-to people in the stories. These people eased the protagonists' anxiety by providing words of reassurance, giving hugs and holding hands. One example illustrating this would be the protagonist from *I can be Brave: Overcoming fear, finding confidence, and asserting yourself* (Kreul, 2020). The protagonist asked a friend to do an anxiety-provoking task with them, "When I don't have enough confidence in myself to go down the giant slide alone, I ask Benjamin if he wants to slide down with me" (Kreul, 2020, p. 16).

Finding comfort can also mean that the protagonists are using their own internal resources and taking actions upon themselves to calm their anxious minds. Doing self-talk (37%), thinking positively (27%), being brave (26%), using comforting objects (17%), using mindfulness practices (23%), such as deep breathing, and accepting the situation (2%) are the coping strategies that we identified under this theme. Self-talk is the most frequently used strategies in this theme and "I can do this", "I can be strong", "I am fine" and "I am brave" are some examples of self-talk. For some protagonists, they recalled affirmations from their parents or peers and repeated those phrases as self-talks. Some books showed that the protagonists took a moment and dealt with their anxiety head-on with bravery, without describing what

the mental process of gaining courage looks like (e.g. Hobai, 2020; Stutzman, 2020). In *Clyde Likes To Slide*, Clyde was trying the slide for the first time, “gulp[ed], close[d] his eyes even tighter and let go” (Marantz, 2020, p.21).

Other stories suggest reframing negative thoughts to positive thoughts. In the book *Do Not Go In There*, Bogart and Morton believed that there could be a scary wolf, evil twins and fire behind a door; however, they decided to open the door and enter the room because they made alternative hypotheses and told themselves that it could be a room that they can “color all over the walls with permanent marker” or they may find “a magic wand” in the room (Horn, 2020). Furthermore, unlike other coping strategies found in this study, texts were not always used to introduce the strategy of using comforting object. Instead, the pictures in the book would illustrate that the protagonists were holding the comforting objects in their hands. Teddy bears or stuffed animals appeared to be a common comforting object across these books (See Figure 15). A variety of comforting objects were identified in the stories, such as a photo of a loved one and a letter. Oftentimes, these objects were unique to the protagonists because of their past encounters, such as a special stick and a tangerine tree that a protagonist planted with her father.

Mindfulness has been gaining attention in the psychology field as an active coping strategy. Taking deep breaths was introduced as a strategy to stay calm and present. Some books provided a lot of details about how to take deep breaths. For example, putting hands on the belly, then taking “a slow, deep breath in through his nose and lets it out through his mouth” (Jane, 2020, p.1). Other creative ways to explain the breathing techniques included filling “tummy like a big balloon” when

breathing in, and breathing out with thoughts “like blowing out candles” (Meiners, 2020, p.11 & 12). A few other books also highlighted the importance of being present in the moment either by paying attention to the surroundings or focusing on breathing. In *Juan Has The Jitters*, he made use of a mindfulness technique to “soothe himself by looking at the students on the field. How many came to compete? Who is tallest? Who is shortest?” (Cruz, 2020). One specific book *Follow Your Breath* (Ritchie, 2020) presented several mindfulness strategies, including visualization, mindful walking and stretching.

Inhibiting emotions is a theme that is the second-most frequently emerged from the picture books in the sample. Almost half of the sample (49%) used coping strategies under this theme. It refers to the time when the protagonists try to stay away from the anxiety-eliciting situation or stressors as a form of passive coping. Under this theme, protagonists would avoid problems (28%), use distraction (18%), ignore or deny problems (15%), give excuses (8%) and/or do nothing (5%). In order to avoid using the bathroom, Raj in *Raj’s Rule* avoided drinking in school (Button, 2020) so that he does not have to deal with the anxiety of using the bathrooms in school. The sample also showed that some protagonists would read, draw and look at something else to distract themselves from the trigger. While having positive self-talk and saying “I can do it” is one way to cope as stated in the finding comfort theme, some protagonists cope differently by saying the opposite, such as “I can’t do it” (Anglim, 2020, p.4) and “I’m not worried. I just don’t want to get a haircut” (Yum, 2020, p.4) are some examples of coping by denial.

Next, solving problems is a theme that captures active coping strategies, in which the protagonists were finding ways to address anxiety by making changes to the situation. 46% of the books in this sample contains this theme. Some protagonists tried to be prepared for the situation (20%): Making a plan (e.g. Julian's house, T-Rex, Norman Goldfish), packing essentials (e.g. Bright, 2020; Salas, 2020) and practicing (e.g. Gallion, 2020; Rowland, 2020) were some ways that the protagonists used to get ready for a potential threat. Other coping strategies in this theme are finding solutions (12%), seeking help (10%), setting expectations (9%) and thinking logically (7%).

Solving problems do not mean that the protagonist is doing it alone. A few books introduced an adult or social support to help the protagonists set expectations. Elmo's mom illustrated this notion by telling Elmo what to expect in school, "First, you may have your temperature taken. And you'll need to wear your mask, keep a safe distance from your friends, and give them big waves but no hugs" (Jane, 2020, p.6). Besides, thinking logically by providing evidence to counter the worrying thoughts also helped the protagonists to manage their anxiety. Archie in *Go Away, Worry Monster* (Graham, 2020) was a prime example. When the worry monster listed out what could go wrong on Archie's first day of school, Archie identified three facts to prove that the worry monster was wrong (Graham, 2020). For example, Archie would not get lost because there were only five classrooms in the school.

Another theme that was identified in this sample was recognizing and expressing emotions (22%), presenting details of how a protagonist copes by expressing emotions to express their anxious emotions. Coping strategies under this

theme are talking out loud (11%), crying (11%), naming emotions (7%), tantruming (6%), clapping (1%) and projecting own emotions to others (1%). When talking about emotions, protagonists often turned to an adult, such as a parent or a teacher. As *The Worry Warthog* noted, “keeping your worries a secret only makes you feel worse. So, they talk to their friends, who help them get through it!” (Pickett, 2020, p.19). In the process of talking through the emotions, some protagonists also acknowledge their emotions. In *The Very Last Leaf* (Wade, 2020), the protagonist Lance recognized his fear of falling, which helped his teacher to work with him to address the scary feeling and find solutions.

Additionally, crying was another frequently used coping strategy in this theme (11%). One book specifically described that when feeling worried or scared, “there is a storm building inside you” (Feinberg, 2020, p.17). A few books also suggested that anxiety may be exhibited as irritability and tantrums. The irritability was demonstrated by yelling and shouting (e.g. Clark, 2020; Hobai, 2020). Clover, in *Clover Kitty Goes To Kindergarten*, threw a tantrum in which she “spit”, “bit” and “threw a fur-flying hissy” (Salas, 2020). While crying and throwing a tantrum are considered passive coping, emotion expression can also be active and promote acceptance in anxiety-provoking situations. Further, it is found that some protagonists do not only use their comforting objects as a companion, but the object also helps the protagonist to project and express their emotions. In *School is Coming*, Martin told his mom, “My teddy bear feels sad” and “He doesn’t want to go to school...” (Aubert & Leblanc, 2020, p.8).

Lastly, a book in the sample also presented a unique coping strategy that is culturally-specific (1%). The book *Sadie Prays For A Good First Day* (McNeil, 2020) emphasized praying as an anxiety-coping strategy. This book was written by a Black female-presenting author and the protagonist, Sadie, was also Black and female-presenting. At the beginning of the story, Sadie's mom told Sadie when they were getting ready for the first day of school, "If you start to worry about anything today, remember to pray to him for help" (McNeil, 2020, p.11) and "don't be anxious about anything: pray!" (McNeil, 2020, p.14). These sentences related to prayer were also bolded in red to draw readers' attention. As Sadie continued her day in school, she prayed when she did not know who to have lunch with, was unable to find her teacher in the playground and worried about making new friends. After praying, Sadie's problems were resolved, resulting in a great first day of school.

Considering how different coping strategies were used in different situations, finding comfort was consistently the top coping strategy across the four themes for anxiety-eliciting situations in this sample even though the specific coping strategies used vary (See Figure 16 - 19). For situations related to school or bad things, reassurance from others are the most frequently shown coping strategies in the picture books; while mindfulness is the top coping strategies for the theme of being alone and health. Comforting objects is the most frequently presented coping strategy for diversity-related situations. Inhibiting emotions are more common for bad things happened, school and diversity-related situations, whereas strategies for solving problems are more readily used by the protagonists when facing issues about health

and being alone. Recognizing and expressing emotions, as well as culturally-related strategies are the least common across all themes.

Chapter 6: Discussion

Social emotional education plays a vital role in helping children to identify and regulate feelings and promote mental well-being. Reading picture books is a very familiar activities for families with young children. Picture books are often introduced as a part of the social emotional learning curriculums in schools and some are recommended to families by clinicians or educators. Despite the prominence of anxiety in early childhood, no research has examined the content of anxiety-related picture books. This present study described how anxiety was portrayed in English picture books, including anxiety-eliciting situations and coping strategies, based on 82 books recently published in 2020. I will discuss the findings by considering the coping literature and interventions on anxiety below.

The Understanding of Childhood Anxiety

The finding presented a wide range of signs of anxiety identified in the sample, illustrating the internalization and externalization of anxiety. Signs presented in this sample such as constant worrying, crying, trembling, experiencing stomachache and having difficulty speaking matched with what clinicians acknowledge as anxiety symptoms (American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, 2017; McLean Hospital, 2022). Previous studies found that teachers identified children's anxiety mainly by noticing avoidance behaviors, nervous behaviors (e.g. shyness, fidgeting, hand rubbing, finger sucking) and physical manifestation (e.g. fearful look, crying, headache) (Campbell 2006; Headley & Campbell, 2013). These are primarily signs that can be observed externally. While there are parallels between my findings and those studies of teachers' understanding

of anxiety, teachers may have ignored the internalizing symptoms that this study identified including constant worrying and catastrophic thinking.

A variety of anxiety-eliciting situations that young children worry about are found in these stories. Based on the themes identified, children are anxious about school, seeing bad things happening, being alone, health, as well as some cultural and diversity-specific situations. Comparing these findings to the deductive codes obtained from the four components of PAS-R (Edwards et al., 2010), the social anxiety component (e.g. joining other children for activity, feeling shy around other people and worry about doing something embarrassing in front others), generalized anxiety (e.g. constant worrying, being in a new situation) and separation anxiety component (e.g. being separated from parents, bad things may happen), were all covered in the result of this study. Threats listed under the category of specific fears in PAS-R such as heights, thunderstorms and swimming can also be found in this sample and these threats can be found in picture books under the theme of bad things happening or being alone based on the context of the stories.

Although health is the second-least frequently appearing theme in this sample, it is a unique anxiety-eliciting situation that is not touched upon in the PAS-R. A past study conducted by Silverman and colleagues (1995) found that children from 7 to 12 years old worry about school, health and personal harm the most. This result is comparable to the anxiety-eliciting situations identified in this sample, namely school, health and bad things. Seven to 12 years old children in Silverman and colleagues' study noted some anxiety-provoking situations that are not covered by the current findings: disasters, money, war and appearance. Instead, being alone was found as a

theme in this study, but it was not reflected in Silverman and colleagues' work. It is plausible that the picture books included in this study targets children from birth to five years old and that the concerns for infant and toddlers are different from children in middle childhood. In addition, being published during the pandemic may also be a possible explanation of why health is one of themes covered by the picture books published in 2020.

Although the themes presented are mutually exclusive in terms of definitions, my findings highlighted that an anxiety-eliciting situation that a child faces may involve multiple dimensions. For example, children can worry about the novelty of going to school for the first time and the experience of being separated from their parents. The findings also suggested the connection between anxiety and diversity, despite diversity being the least common theme. The stories of the picture books showed that children from a specific cultural or identity group may have a unique experience or cultural event that is anxiety-provoking. These cultural-specific situations are less well-documented in the research literature and these picture books provided a foundation for teachers and caregivers to teach anxiety beyond the universal lens. Reading a story that resonates with children's identity and culture is beneficial because children often find it easier to process their own experience and learn about how to handle it by identifying with the fictional characters in the book (Flanagan et al., 2013). On the other hand, children can also learn about the experience of other cultural and minority groups through diversity-related picture books. Teachers and caregivers may use these picture books as conversation starters to socialization children to different cultural groups.

When illustrating the anxiety-eliciting situations, the worrying thoughts are often portrayed as a monster or other scary creature, and only a few stories used a neutral representation. The use of monsters suggest that the anxious emotions are scary and negative, and that it is something that needs to be rid of. While the scary feeling may be true to how children feels, many socioemotional learning curriculums teach children that emotions that are neither good nor bad (all emotions are okay to have). Instead, emotions can be comfortable or uncomfortable. I would argue that using an unpleasant-looking creature is not constructive in teaching emotions and it may make anxiety scarier than it seems to children. Given that emotions do not have a physical form and shape, children may rely on visuals in picture books to imagine and understand what emotions are like. Among the many illustrations in this sample, I believe using neutral-looking creatures, such as those colorful Whatifs in the *Whatifs* (Kilgore & Persico, 2020) may be more effective in teaching children to accept their emotions, and promote a positive cognitive appraisal of the situation and self-regulate.

Overall, despite the fact that a lot of the stories in these picture books were not developed by a professional from a psychology or education background, these books generally captured the key features of childhood anxiety that are per the research literature and clinical understanding.

Coping with Anxiety

This qualitative finding captured a variety of coping strategies that answered the second research question. The themes identified for coping strategies in picture books can be understood by considering Lazarus & Folkman's (1984) categorization:

Problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. Among the five themes of identified coping strategies, three of the themes (i.e. finding comfort, inhibiting emotions, expressing and recognizing emotions) are considered emotion-focused coping as these strategies involve making changes to the emotions. The theme of solving problems falls under problem-focused coping because it is related to the characters actively making changes to a situation. Cultural-specific coping could fall under both categories depending on the strategies used.

Since the target age group is relatively young, these stories also introduced a significant amount of emotional coping along with problem-focused coping. For instance, the protagonist alleviates their heightened feeling of anxiety before finding a solution with social support, such as guidance of the peer or trusted adult. The structure of this plot could be explained by the nature of picture books, in which resolving the tension of the story by making a change is crucial to the story development. Hence, having a protagonist who hides and avoids the stressor throughout the stories seem to violate the norm of a typical children's story.

Overall, the themes of coping strategies found in the sample mostly matched with the deductive codes obtained from Chalmers et al.'s (2011) study. The finding of this study further fleshed out the nuances of what coping entails. In terms of finding comfort, which is the most frequently seen theme when it comes to coping in this sample, preschoolers in Chalmers and colleagues' study stated that wearing toilet training pants or taking medication was helpful. In the current study, seeking comfort covers different examples, such as talking to a friend, seeking company or holding a stuffed animal. The significance of stuffed animals is highlighted in our findings.

Stuffed animals do not only serve as a fluffy and comforting object that provides physical and emotional comfort; some protagonists in the story also projected their emotions on the stuffed animals, such as saying that the teddy bear does not want to go to school instead of using “I”. Although the use of stuffed animals may not be always mentioned in literature for psychoeducation, Harlow’s (1958) monkey study on attachment provides early evidence for the importance of tactile comfort. When the monkeys faced novel and scary situations, they will go to the cloth mother instead of wired mother for comfort even though the wired mother is the one that provides food (Harlow, 1958). Plenty of studies also showed that stuffed animals are effective in easing children’s anxiety in medical settings (e.g. Koukourikos et al., 2015; Montalbo, 2016).

It is important to highlight that mindfulness is a key component of the finding comfort theme in this study even though it is not the most frequently used theme. This strategy, especially deep breathing, is a form of coping that the SEL curricula endorsed. Interestingly, mindfulness was not mentioned in other past literature on coping in early childhood (e.g. Chalmers et al., 2011). Such contrast could be related to the growing attention to mindfulness, along with more empirical studies to support their effectiveness in reducing anxiety (Hofmann et al., 2010; Strohmaier et al., 2021). While SEL curricula may simply focus on the calming effect brought by breathing, the picture books in this sample offered a few more advanced mindfulness strategies for children to use, such as focusing on their senses as they walk, using visualization and stretching. This means picture books could be a rich resource for professionals and caregivers who want to teach mindfulness in detail.

Furthermore, different forms of emotion expression, such as crying, screaming, throwing tantrums and feeling bad, are seen as a negative way of coping (Chalmers et al., 2011; Yeo et al., 2014). In this study, I did not intend to claim that this coping strategy is necessarily “good” or “bad”. Instead, I consider emotion expression as a form of active coping based on the categorization of Zimmer-Gembeck and Skinner (2008) because the process of expressing emotions changes the anxious feelings that children feel. Yet, some stories showed that emotion expression can contribute to reframing thoughts and self-acceptance, which facilitate emotion regulation. This notion is reflected in some evidence-based cognitive behavior intervention manual or socioemotional (SEL) curricula, such as *Coping Cats* (Kendall & Hedtke, 2006) and *Strong Start* (Whitcomb & Damico, 2016).

Apart from emotion expression, other active coping strategies introduced in this sample are paralleled with some widely used SEL curricula, e.g. *Strong Start* (Whitcomb & Damico, 2016), that are created based on the cognitive behavioral therapy approach. The cognitive theory (Beck, 1979) suggested that cognitive distortion can occur and alter the way an individual perceives a situation, affecting cognitive appraisals. Hence, some SEL curricula taught students to identify cognitive distortions such as black-and-white thinking, fortune-telling and overgeneralization. A few picture books in this study also provided problem-solving coping strategies for managing cognitive distortions by finding evidence, thinking logically and reframing the thoughts, making these stories a plausible complimentary educational tool for teaching SEL.

Despite the alignment in the understanding of anxiety and coping between picture books, socioemotional learning curricula and research literature, one specific coping strategy, being brave, under the theme of being positive, should be taught with caution. Being brave can be regarded as a form of emotion-focused coping, in which the child takes initiative to change their mentality in a form of positive self-talk. While this could be portrayed beautifully in picture books with a happy ending, some of these picture books' stories may have added some magical touch where all the problems are immediately solved without showing any efforts or changes made by the protagonist. When using this type of picture book, caregivers and professionals should have further discussions with children on other forms of coping if the “just do it” attitude does not always work in reality. Teachers and caregivers can consider introducing other coping strategies for children to use concurrently with being brave. For example, instead of simply being brave and talk to a new friend, some books depicts that children will engage with self-talk when they are anxious. Saying “I am brave and I can do it” helps children work up the courage. Children can also seek help from an adult and ask the adult to be with them when they attempt to greet a new friend.

In summary, this sample, which comprised of picture books for children aged 0 to 5, presented a variety of representations of anxiety. In particular, the external signs of anxiety were aligned with the clinical understanding, such as the feeling of having a butterfly in the stomach. Situations that happen in school or related to school are the most frequently appeared anxiety-eliciting situations in this sample. When the protagonists experience anxiety, they often cope by seeking comfort in the story.

Inhibiting emotions, such as avoiding the trigger or being in denial, are associated with stories related to bad things that happen to the protagonists. The heterogeneity of the use of coping strategies could be explained by the differences between protagonists' cognitive appraisals, which involve, but are not limited to, cultures, experience and personality.

Implications

Picture books serve as a unique platform for children to learn about anxiety and regulate anxiety. This study suggests that picture books contain helpful information that serve as a foundation in learning about anxiety and it matches with what evidence-based anxiety intervention has introduced. For instance, the Coping Cat program, an evidence-based cognitive-behavioral intervention, focused on recognizing feelings and physical reactions, and identifying a coping strategy for anxiety-provoking situations (Kendall & Hedtke, 2006). While picture books in this sample may offer a context for children to learn about signs of anxiety and coping strategies, recognizing feelings may not always be stressed in the books unless it adopts some coping strategies on recognizing and expressing emotions. The implication of this is that caregivers, teachers or clinicians who use picture books to teach anxiety may need to be more intentional about teaching feeling words such as anxiety, worry and scared, helping children to connect how they feel in a certain situation and how to cope. One possible way to teach these words is to ask children how the protagonist is feeling.

Neil and Smith (2017) pointed out that it may be unrealistic to assume that teachers can recognize all signs of anxiety in school and that teachers tend to focus on

externalizing behaviors, so that mental health practitioners should support teachers in identifying other anxiety signs and symptoms. My finding shows that the signs of anxiety identified by picture books are diverse and they do not limit to somatic symptoms and externalizing behaviors. This implies that teachers and caregivers may pick up an anxiety-related book that showcase signs and symptoms of anxiety that they may not be aware of. To our surprise that only nine out of 82 books in this sample includes a note at the end of the book that guides adults how to use these books with children. When a note was included, we felt that more context were provided to the story even though our team focused on coding the content of the story and did not code the author's notes. Some books use this space to share supplementary information, such as explaining the background in the story (e.g. cultural knowledge, COVID-19), or the mental health diagnosis associated with the characters. There are also books that made use of the author's notes or parent's notes to share additional coping strategies that may not be presented in the books. Authors and publishers should not assume that the readers, including the adults (teachers and parents) who read with children, are knowledgeable in all aspects and will be able to pick up on all the messages that the book tries to convey. It will be beneficial for the authors to briefly explain their rationale, find a clinician or educator to explain how the book could be used or provide more information about the themes brought up in the stories. In that case, picture books may be able to fill some knowledge gaps. School psychologists and other mental health providers may also be able to leverage different types of picture books as a resource when doing consultations with teachers or providing staff training.

Although finding comfort appears to be the most frequently used theme for coping across all anxiety-eliciting situations, coping strategies can be personal and unique to the individual and situations, and there may not be a one-size-fits-all solution to address anxiety. The implication is that publishers and authors may consider diversifying the plot and content of the stories across the books that they publish. Using different types of coping strategies not only changes the flow of the story, but is also a great way to offer more choices in the picture book market so that children who enjoy picture books can test out different coping strategies they learn from books. Another implication is that clinicians who use picture books for bibliotherapy or teachers who use picture books to teach socioemotional skills may need to compile a diverse list of books and provide extra resources to show children that there are other options if one strategy does not work for them. Further, some books in the sample showed how caregivers and peers can model language and coping strategies. It may be beneficial for caregivers, teachers and clinicians to scaffold children to cope with anxiety as they read the stories. For example, repeating key phrases in the story (e.g. “I can do this”) and highlighting the coping strategies (e.g. by saying “you can use deep breathing like Elmo when you feel anxious”).

When it comes to selecting books for teaching emotions, the books should present the problem along with realistic advice (Heath et al., 2005). This means the coping strategies presented in the books should be effective and practical for use (Flanagan et al., 2013). My findings show that the situations in the picture books are relevant to children’s potential encounters with anxiety-provoking situations. Many coping strategies found in these books are appropriate for anxiety-coping and the

tension and conflict of the stories were shown to be resolved after the use of coping strategies. However, some stories may not show much effort or process on how the protagonist manages anxiety, concealing that the coping strategy alone, such as being brave, may not be always helpful enough to deescalate emotions or even solve the problems. Caregivers, teachers and clinicians should be cautioned about using books with characters that receive a magical happy ending without spending much effort to cope. In other words, it is important to pay attention to the content of picture books when these books are used as educational tools to scaffold children's understanding of emotions and emotion regulation, given that some creative content of the books may be unrealistic. School psychologists and teachers should have a thorough understanding of what the book can and cannot offer, then identify additional resources for students to learn about anxiety and coping. Lastly, this study also found diversity among the picture books in the market, allowing caregivers and professionals to find a match between the protagonists and the learner (children), whether it is by physical appearance, cultural background or children's interests. Children will find it easier to learn about emotions and talk about their experiences when they can identify with the characters (Flanagan et al., 2013). Therefore, the choice of protagonists for each book should also be taken into consideration.

Overall, this study aims to address literature gaps and make contributions across disciplines. While literature related to the effectiveness of using picture books for mental health interventions is more readily available, the understanding of the content of mental health-related picture books is limited. To my best knowledge, the current study is among the first that explored the portrayal of emotion and emotion-

coping, suggesting the importance of evaluating and understanding the content of the books when using them in teaching and/ or counseling. Further, the COVID-19 pandemic is a special time in human history and a novel experience for many. This study uniquely captured a sample that was published during such an anxiety-heightened period.

Future Directions and Limitations

The heterogeneity of this sample allowed this study to capture a wide range of representations of anxiety and coping strategies.

This study had some limitations related to the design and methods. First, there may be a selection bias in terms of the sampling of this study despite the efforts of making an adequate and representative sample. The two public library systems that are chosen to do the sampling are based in Massachusetts, a state located in the Northeast of the United States, which is commonly categorized as liberal and progressive. According to the 2020 census published by the U.S. Census Bureau (Frey, 2020; U.S. Census Bureau, 2021), the racial and ethnic diversity in the American population is different from Massachusetts. The census data shows that 60.1% of the American population under 16 years old was White, 18.5% identified as Latino or Hispanic, 12.5% were Black, 5.9% were Asian American, 2.2% identified as multiracial or other races and 0.7% were American Native (Frey, 2020). Comparatively, Massachusetts was slightly less diverse and predominantly White — 67.6% of the Massachusetts population were White, 6.5% were Black, 7.2% were Asian, 12.6% identified as Hispanic, 4.7% identified as multiracial and 1.4% identified as other races (WBUR Newsroom, 2021).

Although this sample was obtained through a search of the public library systems in Massachusetts to ensure public access (caregivers, teachers and clinicians) to the picture books, the sample is a product of the respective librarians' choices. The demographic of Massachusetts could be a factor that contributes to the variety of library books that are available in the public library systems. Based on my email inquiry to the two library systems used in this study, a librarian representing the Cambridge Public Library of the Minuteman Library Systems said that they have a group of librarians who made purchase decisions based on journal articles, their knowledge about children's literature, community needs and requests as well as gaps in their collection. Their staff members also take into account their knowledge of the neighborhood and patrons' interests when making book purchases. As for the Boston Public Library, a representative of the Collection Department indicated that their purchase criteria include patron requests, professional reviews and feedback from the floor library staff. Additionally, the sample is limited to the publication year of 2020 in order to ensure that the sample size is manageable for the scale of this study. Considering all the points discussed above, the findings of this study is unique to this sample and may not be generalizable to anxiety-related picture books published in the same year or all anxiety-related picture books in the market.

A vast majority of the books in this sample are published by a U.S. publisher or involved an American author and/or illustrator. One plausible reason could be the decision of maintaining a small, yet sizable sample by studying English picture books only. Given that the United States is a diverse society with people from different racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds who speak many different languages, future

studies can consider including non-English picture books and conduct a more detailed analysis by obtaining the racial and ethnic background of the authors for further analysis. A previous study found that story books from different cultures displayed emotions differently (Vander Wege et al., 2014), so sampling picture books across contexts may generate a different result.

Another limitation of this study was related to the use of qualitative approach. Similar to many other qualitative studies, the results of this study are unique to the selected sample, researchers and context of this study (Creswell, 2007). The findings of this study are unique to this sample and the results should not be generalized as a representation of all anxiety-related picture books that are published in 2020 and all picture books available on the market. Besides, 2020 is a unique period for studying anxiety since the COVID-19 pandemic is caused by a novel virus. The uncertainty of this virus, the duration of the pandemic and drastic lifestyle changes for many have made 2020 an anxiety-provoking period (Chen et al., 2020; Choi et al., 2020). Given the specificity of the year 2020, it is unclear if the anxiety portrayal in picture books published during the pandemic will reflect and relate to the content of picture books that will be published in the future.

Lastly, for many qualitative studies, member checking or collaborating with participants are commonly used strategies to enhance credibility of the study. Since this study will use picture books as samples, it is not feasible to engage in conversation and verify findings with each author and illustrator who created the book in the sample. The analysis is solely based on the coders' interpretation and both authors and illustrators of the picture books were not involved to comment on which

portrayal in the book is salient to them. Further studies can consider making use of triangulation of data by getting the authors' perspectives through surveys or interviews. Also, authors and publishers should consider adding a note for parents/educators or author's notes to clarify the story's background and intention, helping caregivers and professionals to select a book that matches their needs.

Appendices

Table 1: List of Picture Books in the Sample (In Alphabetical Order)

Titles	Authors	Illustrators
A feel better book for little poopers	Holly Brochmann & Leah Bowen	Shirley Ng-Benitez
A little spot wears a mask	Diane Alber	Diane Alber
A whale of a mistake	Ioana Hobai	Ioana Hobai
All except Axle	Sue Lowell Gallion	Lisa Manuzak Wiley
All Welcome Here	James Preller	Mary GrandPre
An Emotional Menagerie: Feelings From A-Z	The School of Life; Alain de Botton	Rachael Saunders
Auntie Uncle	Ellie Royce	Hannah Chambers
Baby medical school: vaccines	Cara Florance, Jon Florance	N/A
Band together	Chloe Douglass	Chloe Douglass
Bike & Trike	Elizabeth Verdick	Brian Biggs
Catching thoughts	Bonnie Clark	Summer Macon
Clarence's topsy-turvy Shabbat	Jennifer Tzivia MacLeod	Jennie Poh
Clover Kitty goes to kittygarten	Laura Purdie Salas	Hiroe Nakata
Clyde likes to slide	Keith Marantz	Larissa Marantz
Crying is like the rain: a story of mindfulness and feelings	Heather Hawk Feinberg	Chamisa Kellogg
Do not go in there!	Ariel Horn	Izzy Burton
Doctor Li and the crown-wearing virus.	Francesca Cavallo	Claudia Flandoli
Don't let go!	Elisabeth Eudes-Pascal	Elisabeth Eudes-Pascal
Don't worry, bee happy	Ross Burach	Ross Burach
Don't worry, little crab	Chris Haughton	Chris Haughton
Everybody feels... worried	Moira Harvey	Holly Sterling
First Day Critter Jitters	Jory John	Liz Climo
Follow your Breath!	Scot Ritchie	Scot Ritchie
Go away, worry monster!	Brooke Graham	Robin Tatlow-Lord
Heroes wear masks : Elmo's super adventure	Lilian Jane	Ernie Kwiat
I Calm Down	Cheri Meiners	Penny Weber
I can be brave : overcoming fear, finding confidence, and asserting yourself	Holde Kreul	Dagmar Geisler

I'm a scary vampire	José Carlos Andrés	Gómez
It's Halloween, Little Monster	Helen Ketteman	Bonnie Leick
It's my tree	Olivier Tallec [Translated by Yvette Ghione]	Olivier Tallec
Juan has the jitters	Aneta Cruz	Miki Yamamoto
Julia's house moves on	Ben Hatke	Ben Hatke
Kat and Juju	Kataneh Vahdani	Kataneh Vahdani
Leap Frog	Jane Clarke	Britta Teckentrup
Leif and the fall	Allison Sweet Grant & Adam Grant	Merrilee Liddiard
LillyBelle : a damsel NOT in distress /	Joana Pastro	Jhon Ortiz
Lion needs a haircut	Hyewon Yum	Hyewon Yum
Love	Corrinne Averiss	Kirsti Beautyman
Mo and Beau 2	Vanya Nastanlieva	Vanya Nastanlieva
Nasla's dream	Cécile Roumiguère	Simone Rea
Night lights : a Sukkot story	Barbara Diamond Goldin	Amberin Huq
Norman: One Amazing Goldfish!	Kelly Bennett	Noah Jones
Norman's first day at dino day care	Sean Julian	Sean Julian
Octicorn Party!	Kevin Diller, Justin Lowe	Tian Mulholland
A Whale of A Mistake	Ioana Hobai	N/A
Out of a dark winter's night	Flora McDonnell	N/A
Papa, Daddy, & Riley	Seamus Kirst	Devon Holzwarth
Princess power	Natalie Davis	Eda Kaban
Raj's rule (for the bathroom at school)	Lana Button	Hatem Aly
Right now, I am brave	Dr. Daniela Owen	Gülce Baycik
Right now, I am fine	Dr. Daniela Owen	Gülce Baycik
Rot: the bravest in the world!	Ben Clanton	Ben Clanton
Sadie prays for a good first day	Valerie McNeil	Cynthia Meadows
School is coming	Dany Aubert, Catherine Leblanc	Eva Tharlet
Stay, little seed	Cristiana Valentini	Philip Giordano
Sunny the bunny goes to camp	Jace Higgins & Paige Bekish	N/A
The Breathing Book	Christopher Willard	Olivia Weisser
The Good Stranger's Sancocho Surprise	John McLaughlin	Núñez Ruddy

The haircut	Theo Heras	Renné Benoit
The last loose tooth	Tyler Clark Burke	N/A
The Little Girl Who Was Afraid of Everything	Aurora Cacciapuoti	Aurora Cacciapuoti
The magical yet	Angela DiTerlizzi	Lorena Alvarez
The Ninja Club Sleepover	Gehl, Laura	MacKenzie Haley
The Secret Words	Dominic Anglim	Marta Magnuska
The truth about dragons	Jaime Zollars	Jaime Zollars
The unicorn came to dinner	Lauren deStefano	Gaia Cornwall
The very last leaf	Stef Wade	Jennifer Davison
The very noisy night	Diana Hendry	Jane Chapman
The Whatifs	Emily Kilgore	Zoe Persico
The worry warthog	Lucy Pickett	Lucy Pickett
The worrysaurus	Rachel Bright	Chris Chatterton
Tiny T. Rex and the Very Dark Dark	Jonathan Stutzman	Jay Fleck
Together we grow	Susan Vaught	Kelly Murphy
Up and Down Mom	Summer Maçon	Summer Maçon
Wanda's words got stuck	Lucy Rowland	Paula Bowles
Way Past Worried	Hallee Adelman	Sandra de la Prada
We're going on a pumpkin hunt	Mary Hogan Wilcox	Lynn Munsinger
Weasel is worried	Ciara Gavin	Tim Warnes
What A Lucky Day!	Jashar Awan	Jashar Awan
What about worms!?	Ryan Higgins	Mo Willems
What could that be?	Reza Dalvand [translated by Baobab Books]	Reza Dalvand
When Father Comes Home	Sarah Jung	Sarah Jung
Wolf cub's song	Joseph Bruchac	Carlin Bear Don't Walk

Table 2: Coping Strategies Found in Anxiety-Related Children's Picture Books (In Descending Order)

Themes/ sub-themes	No. of Picture Books (%)
Finding comfort	(74%)
Reassurance from others	28 (34%)
Physical touch and presence	25 (30%)
Think positive	22 (27%)
Be brave	21 (26%)
Mindfulness	19 (23%)
Self-talk	18 (22%)
Use comforting objects	14 (17%)
Acceptance	2 (2%)
Inhibiting emotions	(49%)
Avoid problems	23 (28%)
Use distraction	15 (18%)
Ignore or deny problems	12 (15%)
Give excuses	7 (8%)
Do nothing	4 (5%)
Solving problems	(46%)
Be prepared	16 (20%)
Find solutions	10 (12%)
Seek help	8 (10%)
Set expectation	7 (9%)
Think logically	6 (7%)
Recognizing and expressing emotions	(22%)
Verbal process	9 (11%)
Cry	9 (11%)
Name emotions	6 (7%)
Tantrum	5 (6%)
Clap	1 (1%)
Project own emotions to others	1 (1%)
Cultural-specific strategies	(1%)
Pray	1 (1%)

Figure 7: Word cloud – Being alone
(Anxiety-eliciting situation)

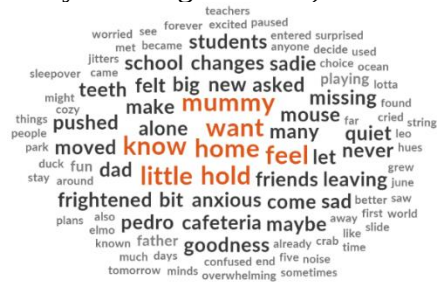


Figure 8: Word cloud – Health
(Anxiety-eliciting situation)

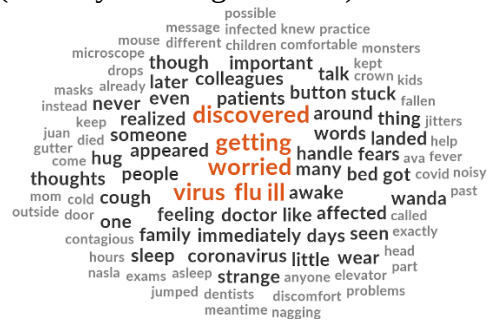


Figure 9: Tree map – Coping strategies for schools (anxiety-eliciting situation)

*The sizes of the areas represent the amount of coding references in the sample. The sizes of the areas are in relation to one another, in which larger areas are shown on the top left and smaller areas are shown at the bottom right.

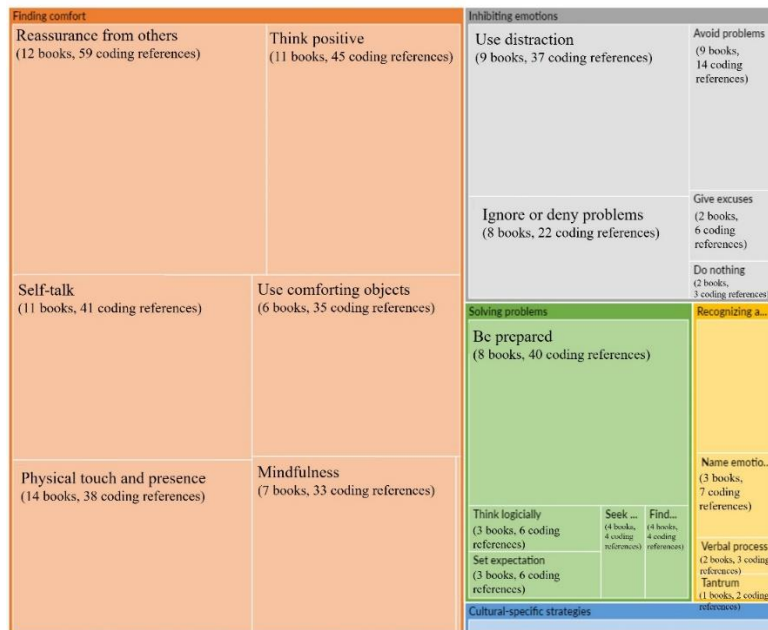


Figure 10: Tree map – Coping strategies for bad things happen (anxiety-eliciting situation)

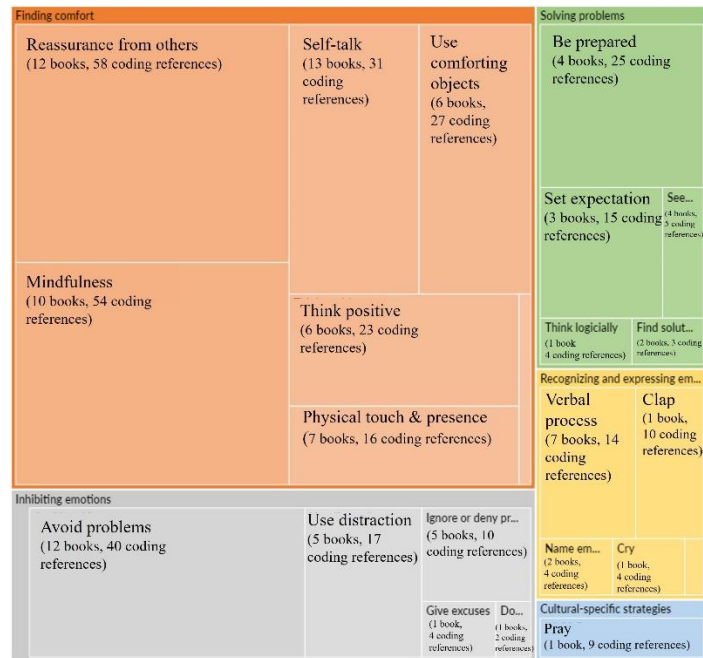


Figure 11: Tree map – Coping strategies for being alone (anxiety-eliciting situation)

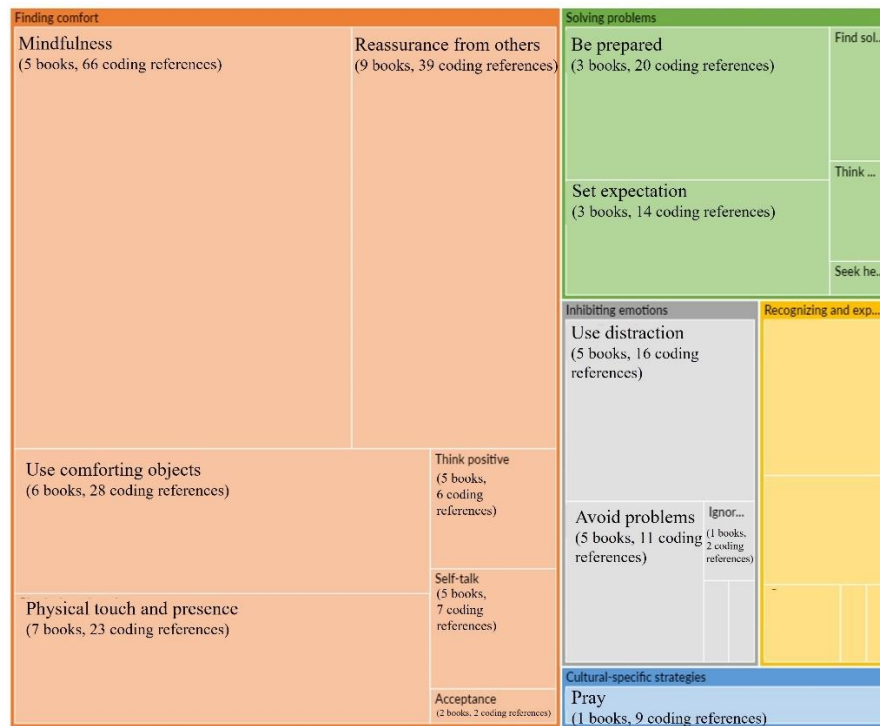


Figure 12: Tree map – Coping strategies for health (anxiety-eliciting situation)

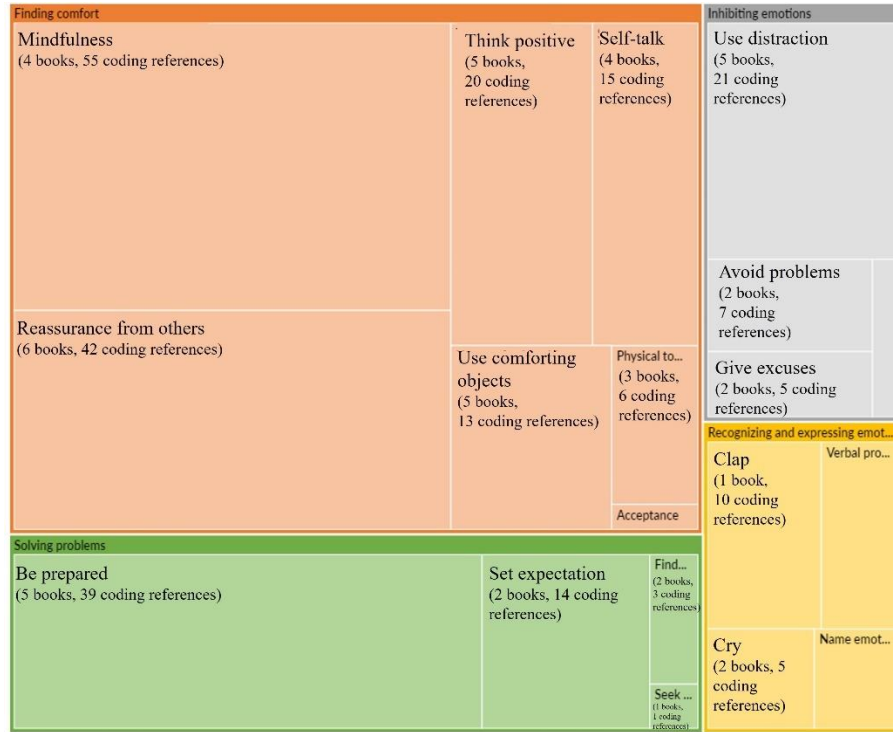
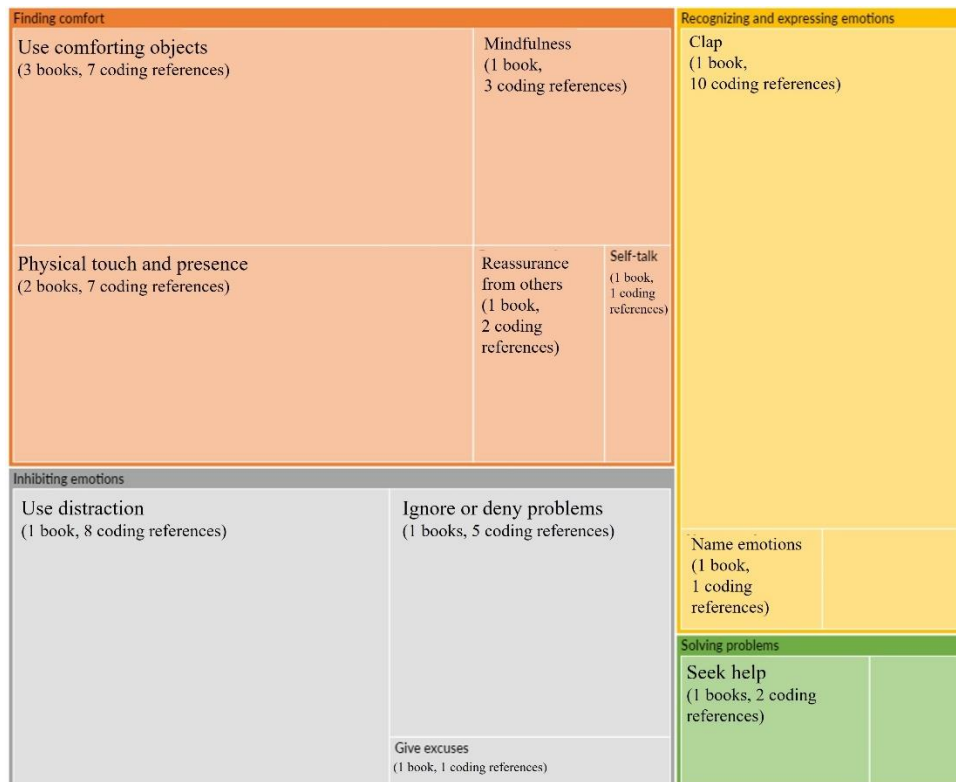


Figure 13: Tree map – Coping strategies for diversity (anxiety-eliciting situation)



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