

Rainbow Trap: Queer Lives, Classifications, and the Dangers of Inclusion

By Kevin Guyan
Bloomsbury Press, 2025
232 pages, hardcover

Reviewed by Seth J. Meyer

How do the classification systems we use trap people into boxes instead of allowing individuals to thrive as themselves? In his book, Guyan (2025) questions these classification systems that are used to understand queer lives in the UK. Specifically, the author is interested in the ways that organizations are “(t)ransforming the queer body and its experiences into classification-ready data calcifies messy and contradictory traits. This transformation buffs the rough edges and presents a tidy whole” (Guyan 2025, 7). Through personal reflection and queer theory, Guyan facilitates how far we have come in supporting queer people and communities, but at what price? By examining these questions on classifications, public administration can ask important questions about the way that we provide services, work with communities, and govern. Examining these types of classifications and the impact on various demographic groups has been an increasing focus in public administration scholarship (Larson 2022; Meyer and Milleson 2022), addressing core social equity issues related to systemic inequities for historically marginalized groups (Evans and Knepper 2025).

Though there are some ways the book can be improved in future editions, this book is an excellent resource to push public administration beyond simple classifications and boxes. The book is divided into eight chapters, including an introduction and a conclusion. Six chapters focus on classifications in specific areas: hate crimes, dating apps, cultures, borders, health and fitness, and business. The conclusion includes some rec-

ommendations, though, as will be discussed later, more would be useful.

The first chapter is the introduction, titled “Queer Cogs in a Broken System.” Within this chapter, Guyan (2025, 3–4) defines the rainbow trap, which:

1. Embeds a partial and narrow account of gender, sex, and sexuality categories.
2. Masks the who, how, and where of classification practices.
3. Ignores information management challenges and the politics of the closet.
4. Promotes solutions according to what is understood as a problem, and
5. Excludes individuals who complicate classification systems.

Through this definition, we can see the ways that the rainbow trap constricts the ways that we contextualize sexual orientation and gender identity and expression by forcing everything into preconceived categories. It leads to a limit on the expression of the diversity of queerness and losing those who do not fit into the heteronormative expectations. Throughout the next chapters, Guyan provides insight into how this trap plays out in real life.

The chapter (chapter 1) on hate crimes is one of his most interesting chapters because of the deeply personal connection he has with this topic. Queer people, especially members of the transgender community, are not only at high risk of experiencing hate crimes (e.g., Home Office 2025) but may not report them due to their complicated relationship with the police (Meyer

and Moore 2026). Having a deeper conversation within the field of public administration around hate crimes is an important way to better support not just queer individuals (Larson 2022) but all minorities (e.g., Yeo et al. 2022). Highlighting the history and current environment of homophobia and transphobia within the police demonstrates why it is hard for LGBTQ+ people to report attacks, especially when LGBTQ+ people act in ways that do not follow heteronormative expectations or expected gender roles for males and females (e.g., Larson, 2022; Meyer and Moore, 2026).

Chapter 2 explores dating apps. Within the LGBTQ+ community, apps like Grindr, SCRUFF, or websites such as Sniffies have long been known to be places of racism and enforced heteronormativity (e.g., Conner 2023). Guyan points out how categorizing and specifying gender, sexual orientation, and interests leads to an institutionalization that loses the fluidity of sex, sexual orientation, and gender. Furthermore, these categories that identify with queer people, such as otter or leather, may impact the way our desires are shaped, who we interact with, and who is left out. Though this chapter is interesting, it might be the least useful chapter for the field of public administration.

Chapter 3 focuses on culture and the television and film industry. While there is more content than ever in TV and film exploring queer lives, Guyan finds that adding more queer people into a system does not mean that the system itself is queered (see also Larson 2022; Meyer and Milleson, 2022). Instead, queering means questioning whose stories get told, how they get told, and who has the power to tell them. As public administration has explored the use of pop culture for educational purposes (Borry and Jones 2024), understanding the limits of representation is important for professors who bring TV and film into the classroom. Chapter 3 provides guidance.

Next, in chapter 4, Guyan focuses on borders and immigration. There are many administrative burdens associated with immigration (Heinrich 2018; Moynihan et al. 2022), but there are additional burdens when discussing LGBTQ+ immigrants and refugee seekers. In chapter 4, Guyan explores the complexities in proving that one is a member of the LGBTQ+ community and, therefore, qualifies for refugee status. Those who immigrate have to prove their queerness in a way that connects with how the caseworker evaluating the situation understands the LGBTQ+ experience. Therefore,

to create a better immigration system, there needs to be an expansion of queerness.

Chapter 5, the health and fitness chapter, explores the ways that health, fitness, and sports are impacted by queerness. As sports can be an important space for LGBTQIA+ people (e.g., Evans and Knepper 2024; Meyer et al. 2025), it is important to understand what can make the health and fitness world queer. Furthermore, as transgender rights within sports are a political flashpoint internationally, it is important for the field of public administration to understand the experiences of queer people to better respond to the current political climate. Through sports and health that focuses on and encourages a gender binary, we are creating a system where those who identify as intersex or nonbinary are not included in the world or are forced into predetermined boxes that do not fit their identity. The system of health and fitness only works for those who fit into the definitions that are prescribed. This chapter also briefly explores HIV and AIDS as a “transformative moment in interactions between queer communities and healthcare professionals (Guyan 2025, 136). By focusing on this policy area, the author links the historical challenges faced by the queer community in relation to public administration and nonprofit sectors (Evans 2025).

Business and professionalism are the last areas that are explored within this book (chapter 6). Specifically, Guyan discusses how diversity, equity, and inclusion policies in organizations focus on the more heteronormative LGBTQ+ people, leaving out those who might be more radical. Workplace policies are an important part of public administration (e.g., Elias et al. 2018; Elias and Colvin, 2020). What makes diversity, equity, and inclusion work within public organizations is a discussion that has expanded over the past few years. But building a more radical diversity, equity, and inclusion means queering what is and is not acceptable within a professional environment.

In the conclusion, Guyan (2025) proposes five ways to improve classification practices:

1. Expose the design decisions behind gender, sex, and sexuality categories.
2. Identify the who, how, and where of classifications.
3. Recognize the unequal burdens of disclosure and information management for LGBTQ communities.

4. Pay attention to how the curation of problems determines possible solutions.
5. Start with the box breakers and individuals who fall between categorical cracks.

Throughout the conclusion, Guyan focuses on the overall problems with categories that he has discussed throughout the book, including that they limit people's identities or force people to conform to specific identities, sometimes by those outside of the community. As a long-term goal, Guyan looks to an abolitionist approach to classification. Since the systems in place do not allow for the full diversity of queer lives, basic tinkering will not improve a broken system. While Guyan is not able to give clear solutions, he suggests a path forward.

Though the book is excellent, there are a few things I would recommend for future editions. To start, while many aspects of the book deal with public administration, it does not directly engage in the field of public administration. As can be seen in this review, there are many ways that public administration connects to the topics covered in this book. Public administration literature can help support the work that Guyan does. Furthermore, the conclusion could give more guidance on how to move forward without categories. Specific steps could make the book useful to those seeking alternatives.

This book would be useful in both graduate and undergraduate courses in public administration and beyond, such as diversity, equity, and inclusion/social equity or gender studies courses. While it only focuses on one group (LGBTQ+ people), the lessons learned can be expanded to understand how multiple minoritized groups interact with public administration. Specifically, this book challenges us to queer the expectations we have of LGBTQ+ people and cultures. These lessons can also be used to question how dominant cultures force minoritized communities to fit within dominant cultures' milieus instead of allowing minoritized communities to be themselves on their own terms. For practitioners, this book is an invaluable resource on how to work with the LGBTQ+ community. Through this text, Guyan challenges practitioners to consider how preconceived notions of homosexuality and heterosexuality negatively impact the ways that LGBTQ+ people receive services.

Public administration has expanded its understanding and discussion of queer theory (e.g., Butz

and Gaynor 2022; Colvin and Meyer 2022; Heckler and Nickles 2025; Galego 2025; Larson 2022; Meyer et al. 2024). As we explore the complexities of queerness within our field, we build a larger understanding of what it means to connect to the LGBTQ+ community and how that might not fit into heteronormative expectations (Meyer 2025; Meyer and Milleson 2022). Books like Kevin Guyan's *Rainbow Trap: Queer Lives, Classifications and the Dangers of Inclusion* can help support public administration explore the ways that diverse queer experiences do not necessarily fit into the boxes we have created. Instead, we should be exploring the complexity of queer experiences by building a public administration that understands and represents the real life of the LGBTQ+ community, whether that be heteronormative or radically beyond the expectations of the larger communities.

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