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*Lesléa Newman , Maria Mola (Illustrator)*

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## **Sparkle Boy** Lesléa Newman , Maria Mola (Illustrator)

Casey loves to play with his blocks, puzzles, and dump truck, but he also loves things that sparkle, shimmer, and glitter. When his older sister, Jessie, shows off her new shimmery skirt, Casey wants to wear a shimmery skirt too. When Jessie comes home from a party with glittery nails, Casey wants glittery nails too. And when Abuelita visits wearing an armful of sparkly bracelets, Casey gets one to wear, just like Jessie. The adults in Casey's life embrace his interests, but Jessie isn't so sure. Boys aren't supposed to wear sparkly, shimmery, glittery things. Then, when older boys at the library tease Casey for wearing -girl- things, Jessie realizes that Casey has the right to be himself and wear whatever he wants. Why can't both she and Casey love all things shimmery, glittery, and sparkly? Here is a sweet, heartwarming story about acceptance, respect, and the freedom to be yourself in a world where any gender expression should be celebrated. Sparkly things are for everyone to enjoy!

## **Sparkle Boy Details**

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Author : Lesléa Newman , Maria Mola (Illustrator)

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## From Reader Review Sparkle Boy for online ebook

### Mary says

Casey is a little boy who loves all things sparkly. When his older sister Jessie wears a sparkly skirt, he wants one, too. When she paints her nails, he wants to, too. When she gets a sparkly bracelet, he wants one, too. Although Jessie doesn't understand it, their parents and grandmother accept it as Casey being Casey. When he is bullied at the library, Jessie finds a way to look beyond the accepted and take her brother as he is. Similar to Morris Micklewhite and the Tangerine Dress, this is a story of being who you are and not seeing labels in everything that is done.

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### Kris says

I'm glad that there are more books out there for young kids that address gender stereotypes and non-conformity. I thought it realistically portrayed the sister being uncomfortable with her little brother who likes sparkly things, but while I was glad she stood up for him in the end, I found it a bit cliched that she came to accept him after she has to defend him from bullies.

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### Kristin says

Similar to Jacob's New Dress, Morris Micklewhite and the Tangerine Dress, and Big Bob, Little Bob, this picture books focuses on Casey, a little boy who likes things that other kids tell him aren't for boys. Casey, however, wants to shimmer, glitter, and sparkle just like his older sister. His mother, father, abuelita, and, finally, his sister tell him that he can be a boy and like glittery, sparkly, and shimmery things. While the books isn't treading completely new ground, it does bring diversity and reasserts that children should be themselves, despite what others think or do.

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### Bethany says

A great addition to the growing collection of books that break gender stereotypes.

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### Vicki says

Love how the adults affirm young Casey's choices and how sister Jessie models what kind of feedback Casey could get - and then changes her mind to defend him. Heartwarming and well done as well as easy to read aloud and discuss.

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### Nikki says

Lovely book! As the mom of a boy who liked to sparkle when he was younger, I'm glad this book is in the

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world.

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### **Stephanie Bange says**

Quite a few books have been written recently that feature boys who want to dress in girls' clothes. This one is different in several ways. First, author Leslea Newman has chosen not to make it about specifically wanting to wear girls' clothes -- instead, Casey wants things that are "sparkly", "shimmery", and "glittery". If his sister Jessie was wearing a t-shirt, jeans or shoes that had lights or bling, Casey may very well have wanted to wear those. I think boys can relate to this. Think about how many boys are out there wearing tennis shoes that light up as they walk... Second, it is his older sister who initially tells him that "boys can't wear that". Casey's parents and grandmother are very supportive and let him experiment, trying on the shiny things. Only when Casey is bullied by the boys in the library does his sister come around to accept his behavior. Finally, the illustrations depict what looks like a Hispanic family, or at least one that has Hispanic roots: the complexion of their skin and the little gold hoop earrings that Jessie wears are indicators. Very few children's picture books feature diverse children who are exploring their sexuality, making this one stand out. Newman has penned a charming story that can be read without necessarily pushing an agenda (outside of "it's okay to explore new things") and is well matched with Mola's equally charming illustrations.

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### **Jenni Frencham says**

Not technically LGBT, since the main character doesn't declare a gender identity or orientation, but the fact that this boy likes sparkly things makes this a perfect book for families raising gender-creative or gender-nonconforming kids.

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### **Katie says**

Awesome intent, really bad execution. I mean, \*spoiler alert\* but Sparkle Boy gets bullied at the library and the solution is that he should only be sparkly at home? I'm glad that his sister sees the light but I wish it had a broader message of acceptance.

I was so so very excited for this book to come out, and the illustrations are lovely. I got it for my library's collection but ultimately sent it back because of that takeaway and it was painfully didactic.

This is an important topic, and for anyone looking for a title that IMHO gets the same basic message across in a much better way, try Bunnybear by Andrea J. Loney.

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### **Ms Threlkeld says**

Challenges gender norms in a way young readers will understand. Could spark some very interesting discussions.

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## Susan says

Awwwww. Just great.

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## Dolly says

There's just so much to love about this book:

I love that it depicts a multicultural family without that being the main topic of the story. A Spanish term for grandmother (Abuelita) is used without it really being highlighted other than as a single glossary term on the verso page of the book.

I love that it depicts some sibling rivalry issues in a completely normal way. Jessie is older and loves sparkly things. Casey, her younger brother, likes age-appropriate things, like blocks, puzzles, dumptrucks, and such, but he also wants to have the same sparkly things his sister does.

I love that their parents are completely unconcerned by his preferences. Casey is a young boy and likes doing 'boy' things, but he also likes to be sparkly, too. After all, *"There's no harm in that."*

I love that this story also shows an extended family member, in this case, the children's grandmother, being just as loving and accepting as their parents.

I love that it shows a family working through their issues in a kind way, and a sister slowly coming to accept her brother's proclivity for embracing the same sparkly things she does.

I love that Jessie comes to defend Casey, from bullies at the library - she may not have liked that he wore a sparkly skirt and had painted fingernails, but by George, she wasn't going to let anyone else pick on him. That kind of familial love rings so true.

I love that the story doesn't state why Casey likes the shimmery, glittery things. Maybe he is a little jealous of his sister getting to have these things. Maybe he just wants to be like her. Maybe he is showing some inclination for appearing feminine. Or maybe he just likes these things. Maybe it's a phase, maybe it isn't. We don't know, and even more, it doesn't matter either way.

And of course, I love that the story shows the family going to the library for storytime. Any book that shows families going to the library make me smile.

I believe that this book will do good in so many ways. It's a kind story and has just enough drama and conflict to avoid being totally saccharine. The illustrations, rendered in pencil and colored digitally, are nicely detailed and complement the narrative well.

Another great book from Lee & Low, Inc..

*"Be Yourself!"*

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## **Jae says**

I like the illustrations and the message is an important one, but it does come off as didactic, which I don't love.

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## **Linda says**

A young boy loves the sparkle and shine that his older sister gets to wear, in clothing, in nail polish, and in a bracelet from a grandmother. She doesn't like it, thinks boys should not wear such things. They're only for girls! As the story goes, the family is supportive and finally, the sister is too when she sticks up for her brother who wears a shimmery skirt on a library trip and gets teased. It may be an opening to talk about differences and choices. The story is rather matter-of-fact and is improved by the sweet illustrations.

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## **Cassandra Gelvin says**

### **Sparkle, sparkle, little boy.**

This story structure has been done to death. Younger sibling is doing something harmless that older sibling doesn't approve of. Siblings go somewhere. An outsider criticizes younger sibling for doing said behavior. Older sibling gets mad and sticks up for younger sibling out of solidarity. Older sibling now accepts behavior in younger sibling as if they had never had problems with it to begin with. The end.

I don't find this realistic, and I don't find the change in the older sibling meaningful. They aren't accepting the behavior because of its inherent harmlessness (or even benefits), they are merely switching sides, like they're the only one allowed to insult their sibling. I'm one of those people who doesn't think that Darth Vader earned his redemption at the end of Return of the Jedi. Protecting his son is not the same thing as standing up to the evil of the empire that he helped perpetuate.

But back to this book, specifically. A boy named Casey has an older sister named Jessie. (This is especially weird for me, because my nickname growing up was "Casey" and my younger sister's name is also "Jessie." But I digress. Again.) Jessie likes shimmery and sparkly things, and then Casey, who seems to be about 2 or 3 years old given his vocabulary ("Ooh, sparkly, sparkly. I want sparkly"), sees what she has and wants the same things. Jessie says, "You can't wear a skirt, because you're a boy. Right, Mom?" And the mom says, "No, that's fine with me. Here, have an old skirt that your sister outgrew." Jessie's painting her nails and they're all sparkly, and Casey says, "I want those too." Jessie says, "Daddy, boys don't wear glittery nail polish." And the dad says, "Well I don't see why not. Here, let's try this." And then the grandmother, Abuelita, (so they're a Hispanic family apparently, although the dad's blonde, so maybe mixed-race) gives Jessie a sparkly bracelet, and then Casey wants one too. Jessie says, "You can't have one." Then Abuelita says, "I've never seen a boy wear sparkly bracelets... until now." Then they call him Sparkle Boy. Jessie's mad. She's kind of jealous, I think, that he's basically co-opting everything she thought was uniquely hers. I totally understand; that kind of copying behavior is both super common and super annoying.

Then they go visit the library and Jessie and Casey both have sparkly skirts, painted sparkly nails, and sparkly bracelets. A little girl says to Jessie, "Oh, I like your skirt. And I like your sister's skirt." Casey says, "I'm not a sister, I'm a brother." And the girl says, "Well, you can't be that, you're a girl." He says, "No, I'm a boy." Then a couple of older boys laugh at him and one of them says, "Dude, you can't go around wearing a

skirt.' 'Why?' Casey asked. 'Because you look weird, and everyone will laugh at you.'" So they're laughing at him because everybody will laugh at him, in a circular reasoning kind of way. Instead of going into the (completely invalid) reasons that people might have to raise an issue with this, and shooting them down. Okay, I get it. The kids probably don't understand what's going on, because all of the discrimination is depicted as being from kids towards kids, and that's probably realistic, but what did we learn here? Nothing.

"Boys don't wear skirts and bracelets and nail polish. Everybody knows that." Casey, starting to tear up, asks his sister if she agrees, and she says, "Why can't boys wear skirts and bracelets and nail polish?" And the other say, "Because that's just the way it is." And she says, "Not anymore." It makes it sound like she's making a huge stand, or like she has some kind of power to change the world, when she's just making the decision not to be annoyed by this one behavior of her brother. And then they go home, and she's okay with him being "sparkly" from then on.

Can't we have her come to that conclusion on her own, instead of only in solidarity with her brother? Like if everybody else was okay with it, would she have eventually come around? Or would she have stayed totally against it? It just seems strange and contrived. Like, "I'm the only one who can make fun of this person, you're not allowed to. Because I do it out of love, or whatever." As if a friend or family member's joking insults have never hurt anyone's feelings.

I was hoping to find something that would address the topic of boys being allowed to express themselves in traditionally feminine ways. This isn't a bad book; it just doesn't really fully address it. Don't get me wrong, I think it's great that it exists. It's a good start in this topic, but I think more books need to be written about this sort of thing. Just as girls have had male role models for many many years, it needs to be okay for boys to have female ones. Girls can wear pants and suits. Boys can wear skirts and dresses. On Halloween, nobody bats an eye if a girl dresses up as a specific male character. But boys can't dress up as female characters; that's not allowed. I want to move past the 1970s, Monty Python style humor of "Look, ha ha, it's a man in a dress instead of a woman." Because it's not funny when a woman dresses up as a man, it's just out of the norm. And what we're saying is, of course women dress up as men; men are more powerful. Clearly women should want to be men. Men are superior. And anyway, men are the default. But they don't have to be. And they shouldn't be.

Message: It's okay for boys to wear sparkly dresses.

For more children's book reviews, see my website at <http://www.drmtmk.com>.

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