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Gender, Intertextuality & Market Demands:
Publishing Children's Picture Books

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Departmental Honors Thesis
The University of Tennessee Chattanooga
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I. Abstract

Children's literature in the U.S. has long since reflected, and also influenced, the nation's societal and cultural identity. The genre's representation of gender has historically aligned with traditionally distinct and separate sex-typed roles of domestic or non-domestic behavior. Through textual analysis of 80 *New York Times* bestselling picture books between 2009 and 2019, this research seeks to determine if publishers and consumers are selecting titles that support or subvert stereotypical gender roles. Prior studies on gender representation in children's literature have concluded that the prevalence of static, passive female characters and active male characters negatively impacts the identity development of child readers (Gooden and Gooden; Hamilton et al.; DeLoache et al.; Bishop). The studies' findings when paired with an analysis of Richard Scarry's *Best Word Book Ever* informed my approach to the literary analysis. Although there is an improvement in the quality of female representation in the sample, stereotypical tropes of male and female behavior recur frequently. While male characters comprise the majority of the sample, there are no male minority characters; in fact, only five of the 80 titles centered on a female minority character. Though the presence of gender stereotypes appears to be gradually declining in children's literature, representation of diverse characters and narratives remains low.

II. Introduction

This research aims to trace the historical shifts in American children's literature and form an educated understanding of how gender is portrayed in twenty-first century children's picture books. I begin by providing a brief, foundational overview of the field of children's literature, specifically from the late seventeenth century and onward, by discussing the work of several notable figures and scholars. The "Brief History" portion introduces the topic of traditional femininity and masculinity when discussing Jean-Jacques Rousseau's work, which connects to a twentieth century example of gender stereotypes. When comparing the original and revised editions of Richard Scarry's *Best Word Book Ever*, I am able to pinpoint what illustrative and written content was deemed problematic by parents during the 1970s (Francis), and therefore omitted or altered. This comparative analysis is useful when conducting the literary analysis of the *New York Times*' bestselling picture book sample.

After examining the specific illustrative and written revisions to Scarry's 1980 edition, I discuss previous studies' findings as it pertains to gender representation in children's literature. The prevalence of gender bias and stereotypes, both in *Best Word Book Ever* and the studies I examine, provide me with a strong foundational understanding of past instances of problematic gender representation. In the "Discussion of Findings" section, I compare the quantity and quality of male and female main characters, and I conclude that there are deficiencies in representation that should be addressed in future children's book publications and studies of this nature.

Not only are future studies needed to track changes in gender representation but shifts in minority representation as well. As mentioned in this essay, the 2014 We Need Diverse Books (WNDB) campaign has led to increased advocacy for diverse representation in children's books.

Though the timeline of this study overlaps with WNDB's creation, the organization's diversity efforts were most likely too recent to drastically alter the findings of this sample selection. If diversity advocacy continues to garner attention from both consumers and industry professionals, a repetition of this study in another two or three decades could reveal further improvements in visibility. Changes of this nature, however, require further action to dispel existing biases and stereotypes surrounding race, sexual orientation, gender, disability, etc.

While several narratives and protagonists in the 2009 to 2019 sample challenge traditional gender roles and recognize different cultural backgrounds, diversity representation is limited to certain groups. As a result, many readers from diverse backgrounds and experiences are excluded. Out of the 80 bestselling picture books, only one title includes characters in the LGBTQ+ community (*A Day In The Life of Marlon Bundo*). Though I chose to narrow this analysis to gender representation of male and female characters, I soon discovered a complete absence of gender nonconforming characters, characters with disabilities, and characters from other diverse backgrounds. These vacancies are worth noting, and as advocacy for diverse representation continues, the publishing industry must consider the changing market and readjust its selected content to meet this shift.

III. A Brief History of Children's Literature

American children's literature, in its earliest forms, manifested as instructional and religious Puritan texts intended for an adult-like child audience that did not exist. Though varying in approach, scholars John Locke, John Newbery, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau effectively established the significance of literature for the eighteenth-century child. Each emphasized the development of the self and the need for instructive and entertaining literature for the child audience rather than the adult counterpart. As the children's publishing industry shifted its aim to accommodate the interests of the child audience, and interweave instruction and delight in children's books, the genre became a distinctly separate unit of literature. In the early twentieth century, children's literature gained the reputation of being popular, and therefore inferior to other forms of literature; in fact, scholar Pierre Bourdieu dismissed the genre entirely as "utilitarian rather than literary texts" (Kidd 167). Around this same time, Harper & Row editor-in-chief Ursula Nordstrom revolutionized the industry with an approach akin to the teachings of Locke and Newbery.

While scholars regard John Newbery as "the father of children's literature" (Kidd 171), Robert Bator accredits much of Newbery's work to the influence of John Locke (48). Locke observed that those in the literary field crafted reading material not for the child reader but for the presupposed, socially constructed "miniature adult" (Bator 46). The scarce availability of children's literature in the late seventeenth century did little to attract and aid young readers in mental and emotional development. In advocating for educational reform and children's literature, Locke acknowledged the dual audience of adult and child but did so by prioritizing the interests of the latter as opposed to the former. His efforts gained favor in the following century and contributed to new marketing strategies which paired and distributed children's books with

toys. Locke's desire to merge education and enjoyment in children's literature would contribute to the growing commercialization of the genre, which was further fostered by Newbery.

John Newbery's editorial and authorial work in the field maintained a steadfast dedication to the child reader, and his marketing approach demonstrated that publishing children's literature was profitable. Regarded as "the first to weave the various threads of interest in children's books voiced by Locke" (Bator 48), Newbery developed and published content with the aim to provide children with "instruction with delight" texts (O'Malley 22). This effort is explicitly outlined in his 1744 title *A Little Pretty Pocket Book*, which Newbery claims is "intended for the Instruction and Amusement of little Master Tommy and pretty Miss Polly" (Bator 48). Newbery packaged, marketed, and distributed "instruction with delight" material to the child and adult dual audience through pairing children's books with toys. By doing so, "he not only sold an extraordinary quantity of merchandise but also conceived of children as a market and children's books as a distinct literary category" (Bernstein 162). This bookselling approach boosted the genre's development in the eighteenth century and has since been integrated into the modern business of book publishing.

While Locke and Newbery advocated for an increase in specialized literary works for children, scholar Jean-Jacques Rousseau challenged this perspective in late eighteenth century. Fundamentally, Locke and Rousseau agreed that acquisition of knowledge and experience are crucial aspects of child development and maturation; however, Rousseau specified that knowledge acquisition, and exposure to the world through literature, should be limited and censored at an adult figure's discretion. Rousseau based this assertion on the belief that "[books] might teach bad habits to the natural child who is to be uninhibited by civilization" (Bator 50). In effect, a Rousseauian childhood manifests as either "the idealistic childhood" in which "the child

is guided through the development of his or her freedom” or “the constrained childhood” in which the child “glimpses freedom only from afar in adolescence” (Scholz 395). The emergence of subversive, rebellious protagonists in the adolescent genre—which established itself by the end of the 1960s (Trites 9)—is a direct effect of authoritative approaches, such as this, to restrict a child’s power and censor knowledge acquisition.

At the turn of the twentieth century, and especially in the aftermath of World War I, the publishing industry and consumer population became fixated with distinguishing “popular” literature from “high quality” literature (Fitzsimmons 82). Around this time, bestseller lists began to emerge and acknowledge consumer preference. Initially, such lists were intended to be an objective representation of the literary market’s sales; however, profit became entangled with status in the industry as consumers referred to bestseller lists to confirm their own selection. Titles frequenting bestseller lists would then recur from week-to-week as the consumer population continued to buy into the top products.

To the distaste of the social elite, the parameters for distinguishing prestige from popularity became increasingly vague. While the *New York Times* bestseller list was “the most elite of the middlebrow tastemakers” (Fitzsimmons 81), those who regarded popular, mass produced literature as less legitimate felt that prestigious literature should not appear alongside popular literature. Bourdieu, as noted by Fitzsimmons, linked a work’s legitimacy and value to the perception of society’s elite and viewed mass-produced books as less legitimate or valuable (82); due to its “popular, simple, easily accessible, and therefore inferior” nature (85-86), children’s literature did not meet Bourdieu’s standards of legitimacy.

In the decade leading up to the Great Depression, children’s literature remained “in the low end of the [literary] spectrum” as a form of popular literature (Fitzsimmons 86). The

children's literature genre, though regarded as "lowbrow" (82), continued making strides to further establish itself in the industry. The tradition of celebrating and honoring literary classics within the genre took root in 1921 when the American Library Association awarded its first Newbery Medal. The medal not only honored the legacy of John Newbery but acknowledged the cultural value of the genre. The awarded titles ascended the genre's hierarchy structure, though children's literature as a whole remained separate from other genres.

The aftermath, and continued economic impact, of the Depression established "a distinct shift in the way Americans evaluated the legitimacy and literariness of books" (Fitzsimmons 89). Consumers began to overlook the opinions of librarians, booksellers, and other industry professionals in favor of the preferences of fellow readers. As a result, industry professionals and consumers developed a reliance on prestigious list-makers, such as the *New York Times*, to aid in book selection. While consumers and publishers refrained from taking risks, Ursula Nordstrom staked her career on doing the opposite. When accepting the position of children's book editor at Harper Junior Books, Nordstrom stated, "Give me enough rope. If I hang myself, I hang myself" (Natov and DeLuca 120).

Throughout her career, Nordstrom edited and published classics such as *Where the Wild Things Are*, *Harriet the Spy*, *Charlotte's Web*, and *Goodnight Moon*; in later years, she became "the first woman to sit on Harper's board of directors and later that publisher's first female vice-president" (Stevenson 259). Nordstrom's steadfast pursuit of revolutionary authors and illustrators established value in a genre commonly dismissed in the literary sphere. At the start of Nordstrom's career, however, the children's book genre remained on the outskirts of legitimacy. In a 1979 interview, Nordstrom explained that her predecessor Louise Raymond "had to go to the editor in the trade department, a man who knew nothing about children's books, before she

could accept anything” (Natov and DeLuca 119). When Raymond retired, “the head of Harper’s said [to Raymond], ‘Well, do you think your assistant could take over?’” (119). At the time that these instances occurred, Nordstrom credited the general dismissal of the genre and its female editors with the small size of the department (120); however, women and children’s literature share a long history as “illegitimate” in the literary field.

Just as Bourdieu underestimated the inherent value of children’s literature, influential scholars such as Rousseau dismissed and underestimated women’s value beyond the confines of the home. According to Rousseau, women should be viewed as inherently subservient to men, adopting the role of traditional homemaker. In order to “foster docility in women” (Scholz 398), Rousseau believed that young girls must be educated differently than boys, with training pertaining to domestic responsibilities. As a result of perspectives such as Rousseau’s, images of the traditional, static female surface, not only in literature, but in the publishing industry as a whole. As seen in Nordstrom’s case, the initial qualifications required for the job of children’s book editor involved gender and proximity. Within the sector of children’s publishing, “women [were often hired] because they were considered to be naturally interested in children and thus experts [in the field]” (Fitzsimmons 86). Not only were female industry professionals impacted by gender bias, women were collectively excluded from the intended audience of high-quality literature (Fitzsimmons; Eddy). The tradition of female domesticity permeated the industry behind the scenes and in the literature produced. As a result, women in picture books appeared almost exclusively as maternal figures while men were depicted outside of the home, active and ambitious breadwinners.

Though riddled with stereotypical gender representation and bias, Richard Scarry’s *Best Word Book Ever* epitomizes the characteristics of a literary product born out of traditional U.S.

homelife. The 1963 edition presents readers with the social reality of the past and the normalization of passive female figures. However, Scarry's decision to revise and reprint the picture book years later demonstrates how changes in societal and cultural expectations dictate the literature produced and published in the U.S.

IV. Richard Scarry's *Best Word Book Ever*

Over a decade after its 1963 publication, Richard Scarry's revised *Best Word Book Ever* contains significant changes in illustration and written content. Viewed side-by-side, the 1980 edition cover page maintains a near identical appearance to its predecessor: a farm setting, house with a rabbit family inside, police officer, milkman, firefighters, etc. Both editions include several of the same topics and illustrations: Holidays; At The Zoo; At The Airport. Alterations in Scarry's 1980 edition include changes to characters' clothing and appearance as well as the written text; the edits also remove scenes with religious, racial, and cultural discrimination and stereotypes.

On the cover of the first edition of Scarry's book, an anthropomorphic rabbit with a stereotypically feminine appearance (i.e. a purple dress and apron) is pictured in the kitchen cooking eggs while a young rabbit brushes its teeth and a second sleeps. While this scene alone does not stand out as inherently wrong, the revisions point to an overarching gender bias that Scarry aimed to remedy in the 1980 edition. For instance, in the first edition, animal characters involved with domestic duties such as cooking and caring for children are distinguished from other characters by their clothing; Scarry's 1980 illustrations suggest that active and domestic roles are interchangeable between the male and female characters. However, the female characters are still distinguished by stereotypically feminine clothing.

As seen in the first edition, adult male characters exist outside of the home setting: on the cover, a male rabbit (presumably the father figure) works in the garden; nearby, a female cat pushes a baby in a stroller while a young boy follows on a tricycle. In the revised edition, Scarry extends the kitchen so that the mother and father rabbits cook together, replaces a scarecrow in the garden with a female farmer, and changes characters' physical attire as if to suggest a

different gender. For instance, the young male rabbit brushing his teeth is now a female rabbit in a pink dress; the mother cat pushing the stroller is now a male cat followed by a young female cat on the tricycle.

The lower half of the cover page features a fire truck with two pig firefighters, a racoon milkman, and a police officer holding his hand up to stop a cat driving a car. These figures are present in the revision, but a few key changes were made. In the 1963 edition, the “policeman” is pictured stopping a male black cat driving a car, but these details are changed in Scarry’s revised scene: a female “police officer”—signified as female by a skirt—stops a grey female cat driving a car. This revision is significant because not only is a female character in the authority role, a black male is no longer the target of police authority.

In the 1980 edition, Scarry edits and often omits scenes of gender bias, racism, discrimination, and insensitivity—in diction and illustration—found in the 1963 version. The principal influence of the picture book’s revision is social change. Discriminatory scenes and phrases concerning roles in the home, employment, religion, and culture are edited with the intention to create a balanced representation. Though the attempt to create a more inclusive narrative is understood, the same stereotypical visual cues are utilized in the 1980 revision.

A defining feature of the 1963 edition is the excessive use of male pronouns for all but those characters concerned with household tasks such as cooking, grocery shopping, laundry, and play stereotypically associated with girl characters, such as ring-around-a-rosie, hopscotch, jacks, jump rope (12-13). Male pronouns are reserved for all else, especially in scenes of action or employment. In the first edition, the children in the various families are all boys with the exception of the sister in “The Bear Twins Get Dressed.” In this particular spread, Sister Bear is portrayed with items of clothing such as a “pretty nightgown,” “panties,” “petticoat,” “hair

ribbon,” “pinafore” and “stockings” (33)—all of which are labeled differently or omitted in the 1980 edition.

Identity portrayal, and specifically feminine identity, is reliant on signifiers related to characters’ physical appearance. Not only does the term “pretty” describe an article of Sister Bear’s clothing, the term becomes an integral part in distinguishing between characters’ employment positions: the “pretty stewardess” and “handsome pilot” (18-19). The revised edition removes these adjectives from the characters’ career titles and changes “stewardess” to “flight attendant” (19). The notion that male characters are in positions of power and control in the workplace as well as the home is further exemplified in “The Firemen To The Rescue” (70-71). Scarry maintains the same illustration of numerous fire trucks, emergency vehicles, and the “firemen” on the scene in both editions; revisions are made only to the diction. On the right side of the original spread, a figure labeled “beautiful screaming lady” waits to be rescued by the “brave hero” while another figure labeled “jumping gentleman” evades the flames on his own (70-71). The question “Will the Brave Hero rescue the Beautiful Lady?” hovers above the scene, reducing the collective group of “firemen” to a male heroic figure and implying that a female character could only fulfill the damsel-in-distress archetype (70). In his 1980 edition, Scarry phrases this question as “Will the brave fire fighters put out the fire in time?” and changes the characters’ labels to “cat in danger” and “fire fighter” (55).

Though two female healthcare professionals—“nurse” and “dental hygienist”—are featured on the 1963 “Keeping Healthy” spread, the women are portrayed as static and subservient to their male counterparts (31). For this reason, Scarry’s edits place a male doctor working alongside a female eye doctor and a female dentist working with a female dental hygienist (27). Each individual is engaged in aiding a patient. In a similar manner, Scarry’s

revised “When You Grow Up” spread replaces the female teacher with a male teacher, a cowboy with a female gardener and female scientist, a commuter with reporter, a train conductor with a female photographer, and a male soldier with a female judge. These changes, though small in an otherwise unchanged illustration, overwrite Scarry’s initial gender-typed occupational roles and provide more equal gender representation in the professional roles listed.

In terms of cultural and religious representation, Scarry includes a menorah in his 1980 illustration of the “Holidays” spread to represent Chanukah. He also corrects two instances of cultural appropriation in which he illustrates a stereotypical Native American “Indian” figure first in a canoe and then again on “The Alphabet” spread propping up an ice cream cone. The figure is omitted from the illustrations in his 1980 edition.

Though Scarry attempts to omit stereotypes in favor of equality in his revisions, signifiers for female gender manifest as hair bows, daisies, and polka dots on clothing; in a similar way, the addition of the name “Bob” on a character’s pink shirt is meant to signify that the character is male—a subtle attempt to overwrite the stereotype that pink clothing is feminine. Despite the continued presence of gender markers, which reflect societal stereotypes, the republication of *Best Word Book Ever* reflects the degree with which changing norms and expectations in society influence children’s literature.

In many ways, Richard Scarry’s *Best Word Book Ever* signaled a shift in consumers’ expectations of American children’s literature. Less than 20 years after the book’s initial publication, substantial changes were made to the content, and furthermore, the book’s republication is a specific instance in which public demand resulted in direct change. When considering the modern field of children’s literature, Scarry’s *Best Word Book Ever* has set a precedent for what is possible in publishing. By acknowledging the problematic implications

regarding gender, culture, religion, and race, Scarry reframed his narrative to include more accurate and inclusive representation. The fact that such radical change has occurred, and is possible, in children's literature effectively negates Bourdieu's dismissal of the genre. In a broad sense, the relatively quick turn-around of Scarry's 1980 republication suggests that the consumer market has the power to shape and reshape the type of representation in children's literature, and perhaps sooner than many believe possible.

V. Gender Representation in Children's Literature

Prior studies on gender representation in children's literature conclude that the underrepresentation—and misrepresentation—of female characters remains prevalent in the genre, despite improvements in visibility (DeLoache, et. al.; Gooden & Gooden; Hamilton, et. al.). Scholars examining gender trends in the genre concur that gender stereotypes and “sex-appropriate behavior” embedded in literature and media heavily influence and affect an individual's self-identity formation (DeLoache, et al.; Gooden & Gooden; Hamilton, et al.). Perry Nodelman expands upon this notion, claiming that there is a “central dilemma of childhood” which requires individuals to abide by or reject natural behavior in favor of societal, “more civilized codes of behavior” (116). Scholars examining the topic aim to analyze shifts in male and female representation and often conclude that the genre has experienced minimal change.

In their analysis of eighty-three Notable Books for Children, Angela M. Gooden and Mark A. Gooden found that “the prevalence of gender stereotypes decreased slightly but the stereotyped images of females [were] still significant” in the 1995 to 1999 sample (96). Another study conducted by Hamilton et al. analyzed 200 books, including Caldecott Medal winners and honor books, within this same time frame. Hamilton et al. compared their sample of titles with publications from the 1980s and 90s. Through analyzing title characters, main characters, pictures, portrayals, and assertive/aggressive behavior, the researchers cataloged the active and passive portrayals of male and female characters. The studies conducted by Gooden and Gooden and Hamilton et al. determined that female characters were depicted in passive and domestic roles more often than males. Reflecting on this finding, Hamilton et al. recommend that adult role models present children with “balanced portrayals of gender roles until the time when

authors and publishers provide...such balance” (764); however, as the next study outlines, adult role models and parental figures’ subconscious prejudices and biases may limit their ability to offer an objective and impartial perspective.

As seen in a two-part study conducted in 1987, gender bias manifests in readers’ subconscious and externalizes, most often, in favor of males. Scholars DeLoache, Cassidy, and Carpenter conducted dual studies to examine a mother’s use of gender labeling when reading picture books to children. The purpose of the studies was to discover if participants would assign gender to neutral characters in picture books and, if so, whether masculine or feminine pronoun usage recurred more frequently. DeLoache et al. reached the conclusion that the act of gender labeling occurs even when the representation at hand is gender neutral.

In the first of two studies, the scholars observed and noted the behavior of a group of mothers reading popular picture books while the second study utilized scholar-designed picture books; both studies found that the mothers demonstrated “an extreme masculine bias” (163). The scholars noted a distinctive characteristic of the second study’s findings: “girls are found in the company of adults [while] boys spend time alone” (176). Though gender bias predominantly sways in favor of males, this “bias” can prove as detrimental to young boys as to girls: young boys in the U.S. face societal pressures to conform to rigid expectations of masculinity which, when not met, negatively impacts self-worth and identity. As mentioned in the study, boys are taught to reject what is stereotypically linked to femininity: “Boys do not play with dolls” (164). The bias toward masculinity proves to be another layer in the fabric of traditional gender roles in the U.S., and this two-part study demonstrates firsthand how gender bias operates on a subconscious level.

VI. Approach to Literary Analysis

For this research, I examined 80 picture books featured on the *New York Times* Children's Picture Book bestseller list from 2009 through 2019, selecting and evaluating the top 10 bestsellers from one week in May. I have included a list of the specific weeks in *Appendix 1*. Each title was evaluated for color use, characters' occupation, physical action or inaction, and gender of the main character. Bestsellers that had no gender representation were labeled as "Neutral" titles; similarly, titles that directly addressed the reader as a part of the narrative were categorized as "You" titles. I accessed this selection of picture books through UTC library and the interlibrary loan system.

When conducting preliminary research, I found that several studies compiled samples of Caldecott Medal winners and Notable Books for Children; however, because my research centered on tracking U.S. consumer choices over an allotted period of time, I selected the *New York Times* bestseller list for my sample source. The *Times*' reliance on sales data and weekly reports as well as its reputation in the literary community factored heavily into the sample selection process.

After selecting the *Times*, the next priority became compiling the titles' publication data and tracing which books recurred on the list most often and which authors had multiple titles in the sample. In the discussion of findings following the literary analysis, factors such as authorial status, *kairos*, series or companion book status, and transmedia influence were evaluated in comparison to overall gender representation. I expected that my findings would reveal that the sample would contain more male than female main characters; female characters would be illustrated as static, stereotypically feminine in appearance, and in domestic roles; male

characters would have a clear aversion to what is stereotypically feminine; and overall, the majority of titles would share factors unrelated to nontraditional gender representation.

Within the ten year time frame, the sample titles with the most frequent presence on the bestseller list were *Dragons Love Tacos* (n=6, 0.05%), *Goodnight, Goodnight, Construction Site* (n=5, 0.04%), *The Day The Crayons Quit* (n=5, 0.04%), *Press Here* (n=5,0.04%), *Wish You More* (n=4, 0.03%), and *The Wonderful Things You Will Be* (n=4, 0.03%). Recurrences in bestseller status such as this narrowed the initial list of 110 titles to 80 titles.

VII. Literary Analysis of Gender in Picture Book Bestsellers

Among the sample of *New York Times* bestselling picture books, male main characters recur more frequently than female main characters with a ratio of 33:22. Though this imbalance is worth noting—and will factor into my final conclusions—the intention of this literature review is to determine the quality of character representation. This analysis shifts from a discussion of overt male and female stereotypes to the family setting. Regarding the latter, the portrayal of parental figures plays a significant role in this analysis, as does the presence, or lack thereof, of active male role models. The analysis then transitions to female protagonists who subvert the traditional parent-child dynamic and take agency in the narratives, often shifting from passive to active. Integral to several sample titles are the themes of heritage, family, and self-identity.

The two most frequently recurring titles *Dragons Love Tacos* and *Goodnight, Goodnight, Construction Site* contain minimal, if any, female representation. In the case of Adam Rubin's *Dragons Love Tacos*, the cast of anthropomorphic dragon characters accompanying the male protagonist are not assigned gender labels; rather, the dragons are referred to as a neutral collective. While female characters are not explicitly included in *Dragons Love Tacos*, male characters dominate Sherri Duskey Rinker's *Goodnight, Goodnight, Construction Site* without exception. Rinker's book reinforces—rather than subverts—gender stereotypes regarding behavior and occupation, implying that females do not have a function in non-domestic occupations, and males must uphold traditional constructs of masculinity.

A *Times*' bestseller from 2012 to 2016, Rinker's *Goodnight, Goodnight, Construction Site* reflects the values of American capitalist society and, specifically, the lifestyle of blue-collar professionals in the U.S. The narrative follows the characters Crane Truck, Cement Mixer, Dump Truck, Bulldozer, and Excavator as they retire at the end of the day from their

construction duties; the character's gender is defined first through pronoun use and then through stereotypically masculine identifiers. In the context of the written text alone, a character's ability to work efficiently as a part of the team relies on public displays of grit and strength: "the tough trucks work with all their might" (Rinker 1) while "work[ing] so hard, so rough, and proud" (25). Though the written content immediately labels the seemingly neutral characters as male and stereotypically masculine, Tom Lichtenheld's illustrations maintain a relatively gender-neutral appearance. Despite this subtle neutrality, the book's female readership is not represented and therefore excluded from the "rough-and-tough" construction play. It is worth noting, however, that Rinker and Lichtenheld's recent publication *Three Cheers for Kid McGear!* centers on a female character; by doing so, the author and illustrator extend the *Goodnight, Goodnight Construction Site* series to include female representation.

As the plot progresses, Rinker shows how each character, regardless of strength or hard work, requires a period of rest and is—in effect—vulnerable, a trait not frequently paired with male characters. Lichtenheld's portrayal of Crane Truck as sleeping with a teddy bear and night light is preceded by a spread of "rough-and-tough construction play" (Rinker 3). In this instance, the male characters exhibit a natural balance of vulnerability and strength. While sleep provides some characters with a welcome retreat to "sweet dreams of twirly fun" (12), others are met with "dreams of busy days ahead" (19). The latter demonstrates how societal pressures to be productive and efficient are deeply engrained in individuals' subconsciousness. Characters exist in a state of compliance even as they are unable to separate themselves from their occupational obligations. In the context of traditional gender roles, Rinker's characters are successful because they meet the traditional expectations of active, breadwinning male figures who are but unable to find contentment in a domestic setting.

The portrayal of masculinity in *Goodnight, Goodnight, Construction Site* poses an interesting parallel to Jane O'Connor's Fancy Nancy series, and specifically the three titles included in this sample. *Fancy Nancy And The Mermaid Ballet*, *Fancy Nancy and The Wedding Of The Century*, and *Fancy Nancy: Poet Extraordinaire!* center around a main character who in many ways presents herself to the audience in a stereotypically feminine manner: flamboyant pink dresses, etc. Though Nancy presents herself as feminine and “fancy,” she and her female counterparts are innovative—utilizing everyday items to build Mermaid Mansion, for example—and frequently portrayed in action. In *Fancy Nancy and The Mermaid Ballet*, Nancy is consistently leaping, dancing, and performing; through this action, Nancy is distinguished as a feminine character who subverts the traditional static representation of females in picture books.

O'Connor's female-dominated series includes male characters, but the inclusion is often minimal and overlooked; for instance, the male ballet student in *Fancy Nancy and The Mermaid Ballet* appears disengaged during the ballet lessons, leaning against or hanging from the barre while the female students sit or stand attentively. Illustrator Robin Preiss Glasser's choice to include a male ballet student reflects an attempt to diversify the stereotypically all-female ballet class and provide male representation where the written text did not. However, the minimal male representation paired with the student's apparent disinterest in the activity does little to subvert gender stereotypes within the narrative.

Kristi Yamaguchi's *Dream Big, Little Pig!* echoes O'Connor's Fancy Nancy series in several regards—specifically, through stereotypically feminine portrayal and a lack of male characters or role models. Yamaguchi's main character Poppy strives to become “a star,” “a posh prima ballerina,” “a soulful singer” and “a big-time splashy supermodel” before realizing her potential as a “spectacular ice-skating star.” In one regard, Poppy's actions demonstrate

resilience and ambition. However, when analyzed through a rhetorical perspective, Poppy's aspirations center on her physical appearance, performance, and appraisal from an audience; these roles, and specifically that of a "splashy supermodel," align with stereotypical perceptions of passive femininity, placing her on display rather than in action. Similar to Richard Scarry's *Best Word Book Ever*, Yamaguchi utilizes signifiers such as long eyelashes, warm toned (i.e. pink, red, purple) clothing, and hair bows to delineate between the male and female animal characters; superficial gender markers such as these are embedded in the bestsellers *Silverlicious*, *Emeraldalicious*, *Ada Twist, Scientist*, and *Rosie Revere, Engineer* as well.

The absence of a male role model, especially as an active caretaker in a domestic setting, is particularly noticeable in the case of young female protagonists; with the exception of Poppy's grandfather, who assumes a distant but paternal role, *Dream Big, Little Pig!* fits the traditional mold with added emphasis on the connection between maternity and domesticity. Illustrations of female figures in several sample titles depict women as carrying out domestic responsibilities while wearing a dress or apron—*Skippyjon Jones: Lost in the Spice*, *Emeraldalicious*, *The Quiet Book*, *Silverlicious*—while paternal figures are presented sitting and reading a newspaper (*Silverlicious*). Judy Schachner's *Skippyjon Jones: Lost in the Spice* depicts a single-parent household in which there is no evidence of a father's involvement whatsoever; in fact, the family portrait includes only the mother, three sisters, and Skippyjon (4). In the narrative, the male protagonist embarks on an intergalactic adventure while "Mama and the girls were starting supper" (2-3). This separation affords Skippyjon the opportunity to travel to Mars, through route of his closet, but simultaneously confines the female characters to the kitchen. As a result, the portrayal of domesticity closely aligns with traditional gender roles in a family setting.

A divide between Skippyjon and his family is further established when Schachner reveals that Skippyjon is convinced that the differences in his physical appearance mean that he is a Chihuahua, and not a Siamese cat like the rest of his family. Through the duration of the narrative, Skippyjon's desire to validate his own identity, in both the real and imagined world, is apparent. In one particular scene, Skippyjon leaps across his room and claims, "You are not a Siamese cat, dude. You are a weeck-ed RED Chihuahua!" when he sees a chihuahua in his mirror reflection (8). In route to Mars, Skippyjon meets Poquito Tito and other chihuahuas who guide him to Mars and refer to him as the "puppito" with which he identifies (13). Skippyjon then meets the green Martian Uno Ojo, who is an exact replication of Skippyjon in both appearance and dialogue (18-19). The adventure ends with a duel between Skippyjon and his Martian counterpart, which propels him back to reality. While Schachner's picture book contains several instances of female domesticity and active masculinity, Skippyjon Jones is the only main character in the sample to expressly struggle to validate his own identity.

Though stereotypical portrayals are prevalent in the sample, specific titles subvert this traditional parent-child dynamic and present the main character as an active female with agency in the plot. David Ezra Stein's *Interrupting Chicken* exemplifies this subversion with a narrative following a father and daughter's bedtime story routine. Stein's protagonist inserts herself into each of the stories her father reads—*Hansel and Gretel*, *Little Red Riding Hood*, and *Chicken Little*—in order to become an active participant in the meta-narrative and resolve the problems of each narrative. Toward the end of the story, the characters' roles are reversed entirely as Chicken writes and reads her own bedtime story for her father. By challenging traditional narratives and modifying popular tales to include herself as a modern heroine, Stein's protagonist also

challenges the passive role of the reader. Readers are encouraged to think critically about the stories they read—and rewrite the narrative if they are not represented.

Andrea Beaty's protagonist in *Ada Twist, Scientist* asserts herself in a similar way as Chicken. Both characters refuse to uphold the role of static, voiceless female character; rather, the protagonists claim agency by taking an active, openly inquisitive role in their narratives. Not only does Ada Twist forge a place for herself in the STEM field and conduct experiments of her own, she is one of five main characters of color in the sample (*Ladder to the Moon* from 2011; *Islandborn* from 2018; *She Persisted* from 2017; *She Persisted Around The World* from 2018). As Ada Twist expresses her curiosity about the reasons and functions of the world around her, David Roberts illustrates her in active pursuit of answers. As the narrative progresses, however, Ada's inquisitive nature is met with resistance. On one particular occasion, after asking what was deemed too many questions, her parents send Ada to the "Thinking Chair." In this scene, Roberts portrays Ada as surrounded by an expanse of white space; on the spreads that follow, she proceeds to fill the blank walls with more questions, calculations, and thoughts until there is little white space remaining. At this pivotal moment when her parents force her into a state of silence, Ada finds expression by taking a new route of action. Roberts pays homage to STEM professionals—most of whom are women—that Ada admires by including novels such as Jane Goodall's *In The Shadow of Man*, Marie Curie's *Radioactive Substances*, Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, and Carl Sagan's *Cosmos* in his illustrations.

Beaty's companion book, and second bestseller in the sample, *Rosie Revere, Engineer* follows a shy young girl who overcomes discouragement and self-doubt to pursue the dream of becoming an engineer. Roberts' take on the "Thinking Chair" spread is mirrored in *Rosie Revere, Engineer* as Rosie works late into the night, filling white space with her innovative projects (5-

6). *Rosie Revere, Engineer* and *Ada Twist, Scientist* exemplify a written and illustrative collaboration to provide female representation outside of the domestic setting and, in this case specifically, place female protagonists in stereotypically male-dominated occupations. Beaty's bestsellers are some of the only titles in the sample to directly subvert traditional gender stereotypes and present readers with female protagonists that exist beyond the domestic sphere.

Chelsea Clinton's *She Persisted* and *She Persisted Around The World* present young female readers with the stories of twenty-six American and international women who challenged the societal and cultural limitations placed on gender. In *She Persisted*, Clinton offers readers a glimpse into the history of gender relations in the U.S. and the various forms of oppression and injustice each woman faced. Refusing to be static bystanders in the corruption around them, these American women advocated for an end to slavery, segregation, disability discrimination, and unfair working conditions. At a time when "working women were 'a monstrosity'" (9-10), Nelly Bly became a reporter; at a time when schools refused to admit black students, kindergartener Ruby Bridges walked past protesters to go to school (17-18); at a time "long before girls had such dreams," Virginia Apgar revolutionized the medical field with the Apgar score (11-12). Several of these women—such as Sonia Sotomayor, Helen Keller, Maria Tallchief, Margaret Chase Smith, and Sally Ride—opened the door so that future female leaders could follow. Through presenting readers with notable American role models of diverse backgrounds, Clinton instills the belief that there is pride in claiming one's identity—one's heritage, gender, and capability. *She Persisted Around The World* expands upon this notion by establishing solidarity among women, despite differences in nationality, heritage, culture, experience, and location in the world.

Junot Díaz's *Islandborn* and Maya Soetoro-Ng's *Ladder To The Moon*, similarly, stress the significance of heritage, a connection that cannot be severed regardless of generational separation or physical proximity. Díaz's multicultural picture book follows protagonist Lola as she seeks to access the Island where she was born through the memories of those around her. In doing so, Lola learns about "the Monster," the dictator Rafael Trujillo, who terrorized the Dominican Republic for thirty years. One spread, shortly after the Monster is introduced, depicts six female figures standing on the shoreline in victory, holding hands with each other and three male figures. The significance of this image is mirrored in the statement, "Heroes rose up. Strong smart young women just like you, Lola, and a few strong smart young men, too" (29-30). In this way the storyteller, a character named Mr. Mir, instills a sense of pride in Lola by reminding her that she is a part of this legacy of strong women and the struggle for freedom.

Soetoro-Ng's female protagonist Suhaila traverses beyond the veil of death and memory to connect with her own heritage in *Ladder To The Moon*. In this narrative, Suhaila learns more about her grandmother through her mother's stories. "Your grandma would wrap her arms around the whole world if she could," Suhaila's mother told her before adding, "You have Grandma Annie's hands" (2). Similar to *Islandborn*, Suhaila's connection to heritage and her temporary visit with her grandmother is not without devastation. The narrative is filled with violent scenes of drowning children, dehydration, and bombing—scenes in which Grandma Annie extends the ladder to the moon and embraces each loss with care. The strength, compassion, and camaraderie of women maintains a strong presence in both Díaz and Soetoro-Ng's narratives; both protagonists are faced with scenes of the injustice and loss and navigate difficult emotions and experiences alongside their adult counterparts.

The significance of female empowerment is pointedly discussed in Amy Krouse Rosenthal and Paris Rosenthal's *Dear Girl*. Rosenthal and Rosenthal encourage young girls to exercise their intellectual and emotional capabilities: to speak up in the classroom, to ask questions, to be alone, to cry, to reflect. As for physical attributes, the authors encourage body positivity—in terms of freckles, birthmarks, hair color—and claim that readers shouldn't feel pressured to look a particular way. Stereotypical tropes of femininity—pink décor, clothing, etc.—are included in the narrative but as a form of self-expression rather than an obligatory presentation of gender. It is worth noting, in fact, that for a majority of the narrative the female characters are illustrated wearing white clothing. Paris Rosenthal and Jason Rosenthal's companion book *Dear Boy*, directly addresses the stigmas surrounding masculinity. The authors, and illustrator Holly Hatam, acknowledge and subvert the stereotypical expectation that boys play with trucks and girls play with dolls. Boys and girls are depicted playing together without the social pressures to conform to "right" or "wrong" play. The male-female friendship dynamic encouraged in *Dear Boy*, and *Dear Girl*, is echoed in David Soman and Jacky Davis' *Ladybug Girl and Bumblebee Boy*, Dan Santat's *The Adventures of Beekle*, and Ryan T. Higgins' *We Don't Eat Our Classmates*. Each of the aforementioned titles describe the complications that arise when forming friendships at a young age—struggles to belong, to agree, and, in the case of Higgins' T-Rex protagonist, to not snack on other kids.

Several titles in the sample extended this sense of camaraderie and purpose to environmentalism and characters' efforts in caring for nature. Lane Smith's young male protagonist in *Grandpa Green* learns about his great grandfather's life through horticulture sculptures, and in this way, the garden becomes an active agent in the plot. Peter Brown's *The Curious Gardener* and Victoria Kann's *Emeraldalicious* approach environmental work in a

similar way, basing their young protagonists in settings where pollution inhibits natural growth; both main characters work to improve the state of the environment by taking initiative and working with others. *Arthur Turns Green*, *We Are The Gardeners*, *Touch The Earth*, *My Garden*, and *Me...Jane* advocate for a better, greener world through the efforts of young protagonists.

When I began the process of analyzing the sample pool, it became apparent that several bestsellers could not be analyzed for gender representation. The label “Neutral” was assigned to titles in which gender-identifiers were not included in the written or illustrated text, such as animals generalized as anthropomorphic characters with little to no indication of gender. Sixteen sample titles were labeled as “Neutral,” and ten books were categorized as “You” titles due to the author’s use of second-person point of view to address the implied child reader—an approach that made gender subjective to the audience group. However, because “You” titles include illustrations of both male and female characters, the titles were not labeled as neutral.

Chelsea Clinton’s *Don’t Let Them Disappear* provides a brief synopsis of twelve endangered species’ diets and habitats as well as details about species’ endangered status. Aside from mention of species’ familial behavior, the book’s written and illustrative content do not assign a specific gender identity to the animals portrayed. Matthew Van Fleet’s *Cat* and Simon Beecroft’s *Lego Star Wars: The Visual Dictionary* achieve a similar effect, pairing facts with illustrations without assigning gender. In the case of Deborah Underwood’s *The Loud Book!* and *The Quiet Book*, illustrator Renata Liwska portrays the animal characters without any distinct gender markers, except in the case of adult female characters who were often portrayed as mother figures. While Jon J. Muth’s paintings in Caroline Kennedy’s *Poems to Learn By Heart* portray male and female characters, there is not a main character or an overarching narrative; for this reason, the Kennedy’s picture book was also considered neutral. By classifying certain

sample titles as “Neutral” or “You” books, I was better equipped to examine the similarities and differences among the titles with gender representation; as a result, I was able to analyze the “Neutral” and “You” groups in the same way.

Rufus Butler Seder’s scanimation picture book series *Gallop!*, *Swing!*, and *Waddle!* rose to bestseller status due to Seder’s experimentation with style and movement; however, the titles could not be analyzed for gender representation. Similar in experimental approach, Hervé Tullet’s *Press Here* and B.J. Novak’s *The Book With No Pictures* engage the adult and child reader in active participation with the text. *Press Here* presents the reader with a series of yellow, red, and blue dots that change position when the reader follows the written instructions. Tullet’s illustrations respond to the written text, allowing the reader to take part in the narrative’s progression. In contrast, Novak’s *The Book With No Pictures* experiments with reader participation through use of written text alone. Novak utilizes font size, color, and tone to create a humorous narrative dialogue by placing the adult reader at odds with what the book requires the reader to say: “BLORK. Wait—what? That doesn’t even mean anything. BLUURF” (13-14). While both of the aforementioned titles demonstrate experimentation in the genre and the relationship between visual and verbal cues, *Press Here* and *The Book With No Pictures* neither affirm nor challenge the gender stereotypes examined in this research.

The majority of “You” titles portrayed a speaker-to-reader narrative in which the child audience is encouraged to cultivate a sense of identity and pursue their potential, often with the guidance of the parental figure (*Dear Boy*, from 2019; *Dear Girl*, from 2017; *I Wish You More* from 2015; *I’ve Loved You Since Forever* from 2018; *I Love Mom With The Very Hungry Caterpillar* from 2017; *Touch The Earth* from 2017). Brian Floca’s *Locomotive* loosely follows the journey of a mother and her children aboard America’s first transcontinental railroad but does

so by leading the reader through a tour of the train and describing the logistics of the train's operation and history.

While the "Neutral" and "You" titles were excluded—by necessity—from gender-specific analysis, the books inform my understanding of the common characteristics of bestsellers within the sample. Authors' use of second-person point of view occurred more frequently than I had anticipated, and presumably more so in children's literature than other literary genres.

VIII. Discussion of Findings

a. Publication Data

Each of the Big Five publishing groups—Penguin Random House, HarperCollins, Hachette Book Group, Simon & Schuster, and Macmillan—are represented in this sample, as are eight additional publishing groups including Candlewick Press, Chronicle Books, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, etc. Penguin Random House (PRH) and nine affiliated imprints account for 25.09% of the bestsellers; PRH imprints Dial Books for Young Readers and Philomel Books have the most bestselling publications in the publishing group. HarperCollins (21.3%) and Hachette Book Group (18.8%) follow PRH in highest percentage of bestselling title publications. Simon & Schuster and Macmillan publications are in the lower percentile of the publishers represented: Simon & Schuster published 3.8% of bestselling titles while Macmillan published 2.5%.

Over the documented weeks, the author with the most titles on the list is Mo Willems, whose bestsellers were new additions to his Elephant and Piggie series—*Waiting Is Not Easy!* and *Let's Go For A Drive!*—and Pigeon series—*The Pigeon Needs A Bath!* and *The Duckling Gets A Cookie!?*. The recurring presence of series books in the sample reaffirms Fitzsimmons' belief that consumer anxiety about purchasing the “right” book leads consumers to purchase titles that have been popularized—through series or companion book installments (89). Jane O'Connor's Fancy Nancy series, Eric Litwin and James Dean's Pete The Cat series, Marc Brown's Arthur Adventure series, and Victoria Kann's Pinkalicious series were a few of the bestselling series with a significant presence in the sample.

As this sample suggests, an author's celebrity appeal or status factors into a book's bestseller potential. In the case of several titles, merging factors such as authorial status and

kairos are effective in skyrocketing titles to the bestseller list. The sociopolitical context of Chelsea Clinton's *She Persisted* and *She Persisted Around The World*, for instance, played a significant role in attracting consumers. Clinton's publications followed Hilary Clinton's run in the 2016 presidential election and Senator Elizabeth Warren's adamant to be heard during a Senate meeting in 2017; these events shaped the *kairos* of the time and, in turn, Clinton's narratives. Both *She Persisted* and its companion book pay homage to influential women nationally and internationally, utilizing the industry's companion book trend to further expand on the social call for female empowerment in the face of adversity. Consumers' familiarity with Clinton and her familial connection to notable political figures prove to be significantly tied to her books' successes.

In a similar vein, *Ladder To The Moon* author Maya Soetoro-Ng is recognized as former President Barack Obama's sister; however, Soetoro-Ng's narrative centers on the generational and familial connection of women rather than political ties. Well-known public figures beyond the political sphere also claimed bestsellers in this sample, including actress and singer Julie Andrews, Olympic figure skater Kristi Yamaguchi, John Lennon's son Julian Lennon, and TV personality Joanna Gaines. Consumers' gravitation toward celebrity and well-known authors demonstrates the marketability of familiarity in the publishing sphere, which in turn reaffirms the "right" book selection phenomenon (Fitzsimmons 89).

The companion book trend follows suit with a notable presence in the sample. R.J. Palacio's bestselling picture book *We're All Wonders* and Todd and Sonja Burpo's *Heaven is for Real for Kids* were both published as companion books to the bestselling novels, *Wonder* and *Heaven is for Real*. The role of transmedia—storytelling across different platforms such as print, film, and audio—in the success of these publications is also worth noting: the film *Wonder*

debuted eight months after the release of *We're All Wonders* while the 2014 film adaptation of *Heaven is for Real* followed years after the picture book's publication.

While most titles achieved bestseller status within five years of publication, Eric Carle's *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* surged to #3 on the list 40 years after the book's original publication, and Dr. Seuss' *The Lorax* (1971) returned to the bestseller list in 2012, 41 years after original publication. In the case of *The Lorax*, transmedia influenced the book's renewed popularity: Universal Pictures released a film adaptation of the book in March that year, and two months later, Seuss' book had been on the bestseller list for 10 weeks.

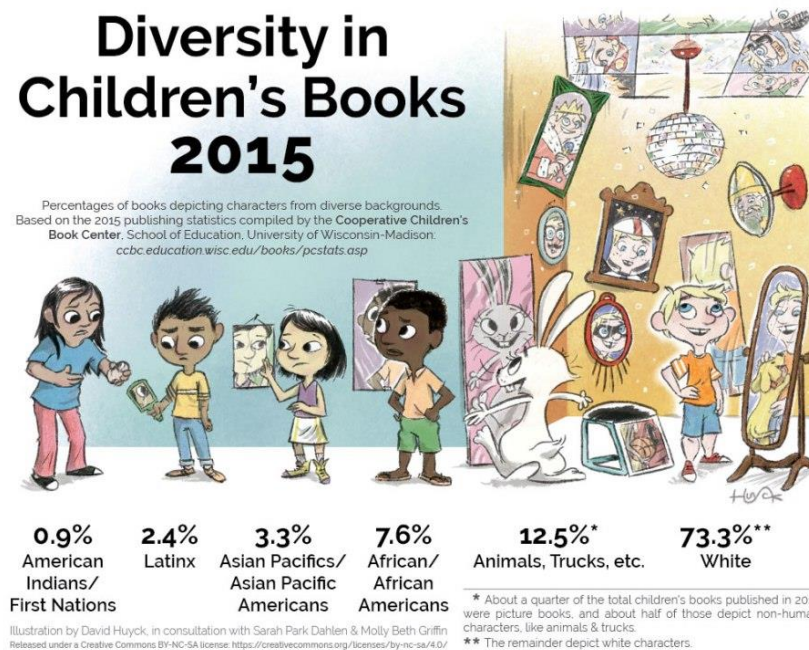
Collectively, the factors that influence a title's bestseller potential include status of author, *kairos*, transmedia, and longevity as a series or companion installment. This sample suggests that a title is more likely to become a bestseller if several of these factors merge and function simultaneously. Bestseller status can be accredited to each of the aforementioned factors, but ultimately, consumer preference is the single factor that dictates the *New York Times* bestseller list.

b. The Question of Representation

In recent years, advocates for diversity in children's literature have developed initiatives such as We Need Diverse Books and #ownvoices to celebrate and encourage the production and distribution of diverse books by diverse authors. In a 2016 TEDTalk, WNDB advocate and author Grace Lin discussed how, at a young age, the lack of Asian representation in books led her to reject aspects of her identity and heritage. Lin emphasized the need for "windows and mirrors," a term coined by Rudine Sims Bishop which promotes diversity and inclusion through providing readers with characters from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and experiences beyond that of the white character (Bishop). Not only did the #WeNeedDiverseBooks campaign

advocate for diversity in literature but in every facet of the creation and distribution process; in fact, founder Ellen Oh and others tweeted this hashtag in direct response to the announcement of an all-white panel at BookCon, an annual convention held in New York (“Media Kit”).

In the five years since the creation of We Need Diverse Books, the call for diversity has attracted attention from industry professionals, authors, and readers nationwide; however, minority representation in children’s literature remains low. The 2015 and 2018 Diversity in Children’s Books studies utilized data from the University of Wisconsin-Madison’s Cooperative Children’s Book Center and found that animal and white characters maintained the highest percentage of visibility in children’s literature (Dahlen). In both of the infographics below, minority individuals gaze into mirrors that regress in size from right to left, demonstrating the imbalance in “windows and mirrors” representation.



DIVERSITY IN CHILDREN'S BOOKS 2018

Percentage of books depicting characters from diverse backgrounds based on the 2018 publishing statistics compiled by the Cooperative Children's Book Center, School of Education, University of Wisconsin-Madison: ccbc.education.wisc.edu/books/pcstats.asp



While the 2018 infographic demonstrates improvements in representation since the publication of the 2015 infographic—with a lower percentage of white characters and slight increases in minority representation—the “Animal/Other” and “White” character groups have maintained higher visibility rates. In fact, the “Animal/Other” category increased from 12.5% to 27% in the most recent study. When comparing the 2015 and 2018 infographics, the decline in “White” characters is mirrored in David Huyck’s 2018 illustration, as the right edge of the image begins to fade. Though the 2018 infographic shows slight improvements from the prior study, increased efforts to promote and support diverse literature has not yet redefined the reality of modern children’s literature.

In terms of overall gender representation in the sample, the majority of narratives center on a male main character (41.3%) rather than a female main character (27.5%). When examining the categories of male and female main characters, three subcategories emerged: “White,” “Animal/Other,” and “Minority” character. These subcategories are intended to mirror the

specified character descriptions and backgrounds in the 2018 Diversity in Children's Books infographic and determine how heavily diversity factors into this particular sample.

Of the twenty-one titles featuring a female protagonist, five titles portrayed a minority character as the lead (*Islandborn* from 2018; *Ladder To The Moon* from 2011; *Ada Twist, Scientist* from 2016; *She Persisted* from 2017; *She Persisted Around The World* from 2018). Though this count may seem low, female minority representation is on par with the number of female nonhuman characters in the sample (*Figure 1*). In the narratives centered on female minority characters, the young protagonists connect to their heritage, pursue interests outside of the domestic sphere, and find encouragement in female role models. Even still, the sample contains a higher representation of white female main characters, several of whom fit the stereotypical female mold.

When comparing representation of male main characters in the same three subcategories, representation is far different. Whereas white female characters recurred most frequently within the female category, male "Animal/Other" characters maintained the highest rate of visibility (*Figure 2*). Nonhuman and white characters accounted for 63.6% and 36.4% of male representation. To be clear, of the 33 bestselling titles with male main characters, there were no male minority characters. This finding is immensely problematic, especially when male characters otherwise had the highest representation in the sample.

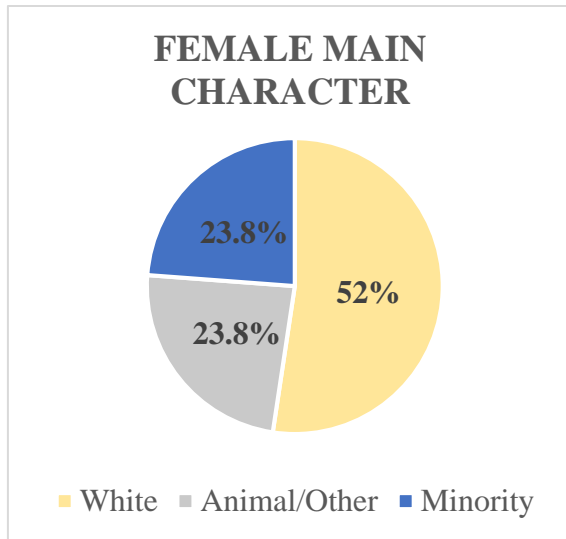


Figure 1

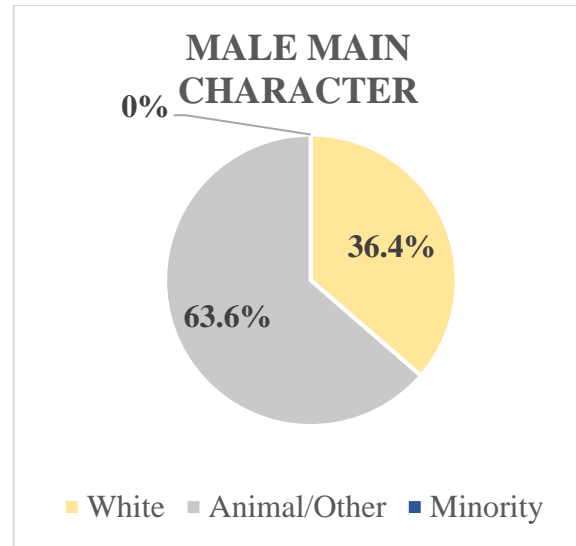


Figure 2

When compared to the 2018 Diversity in Children’s Books infographic, the percentage of female white characters in the *Times*’ sample exceeds the 2018 statistics by 2%; my analysis of female main characters shows a lower percentage of nonhuman characters and a higher visibility for minority characters than the infographic. Though white and nonhuman characters maintain the highest percentages in my study of male main characters and the 2018 infographic, my findings reflect a reverse in representation: as seen in *Figure 2*, “Animal/Other” characters far exceed “White” characters. In both studies, however, minority representation is painstakingly low.

Overall, character portrayal in the Fancy Nancy series books (n=3), Pinkalicious series books (n=2), *The Very Fairy Princess: Here Comes The Flower Girl*, and *Dream Big, Little Pig!* closely aligns with traditional, stereotypical female representation. However, a notable portion of the remaining titles present active female characters taking agency in their narratives, often embarking on real and imagined adventures (*Journey* from 2013, *Interrupting Chicken* from 2010, *Islandborn* from 2018, *Ladder to the Moon* from 2011, *My Garden* from 2010, *Me...Jane* from 2011). Andrea Beaty’s companion books *Rosie Revere, Engineer* and *Ada Twist, Scientist*

offer young readers female representation in the STEM field, demonstrating a complete subversion of the traditional static, domestic female character. Empowerment through female role models achieves the similar effect of encouraging young female readers to persevere regardless of societal stigmas or limitations, as seen in Chelsea Clinton's *She Persisted* and *She Persisted Around The World*. The remaining titles explore themes of friendship, self-identity, and belonging (*We Don't Eat Our Classmates* from 2018; *A Ball For Daisy* from 2011; *Ladybug Girl and Bumblebee Boy* from 2009).

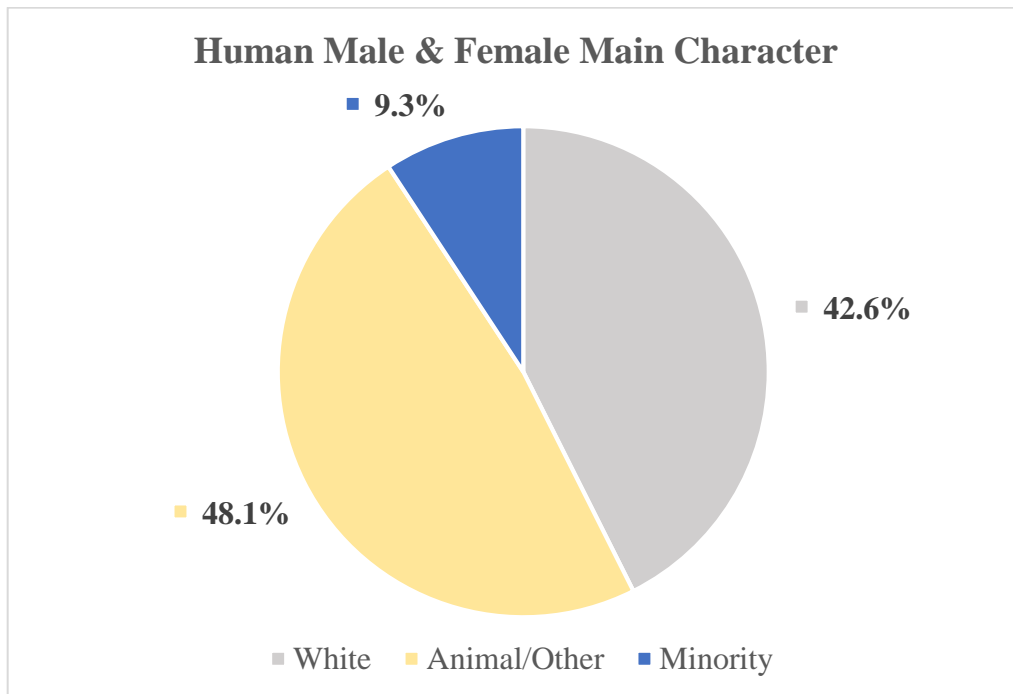
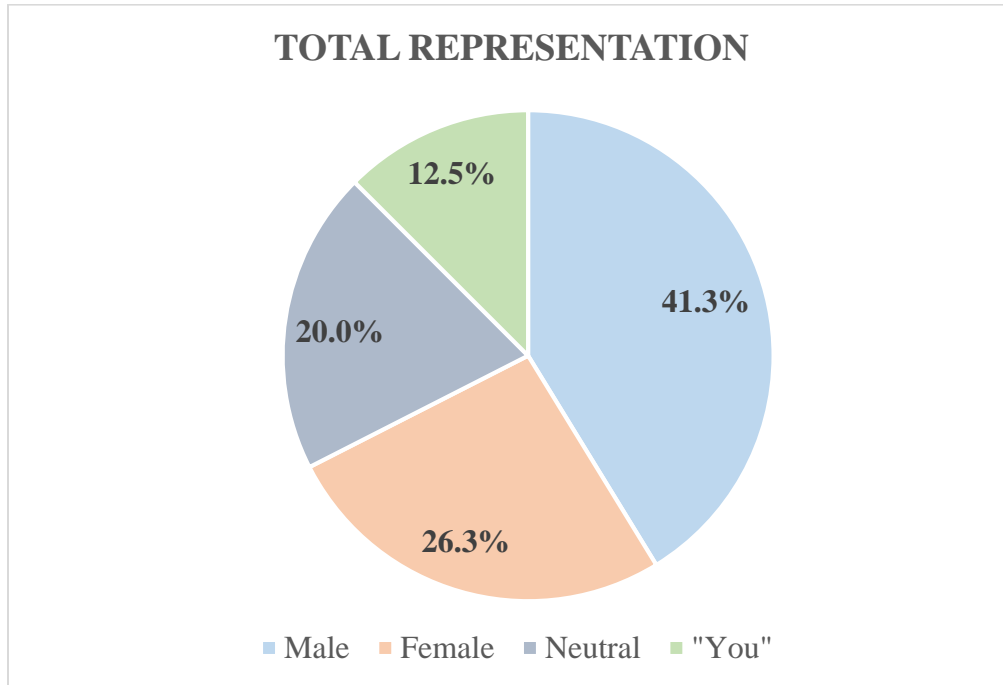
Though I chose to narrow my analysis to stereotypical male-female representation, there is a need to extend research past gender binaries to account for the spectrum of gender and sexuality. It is worth noting that only one title out of the 80 bestsellers in this sample centered on a main character who is a part of the LGBTQ+ community (*Day in the Life of Marlon Bundo*). While picture books with transgender protagonists have been published in recent years, such as Marcus Ewert's *10,000 Dresses*, a transgender narrative is not present in this sample. The absence of titles like *10,000 Dresses* in the sample suggests that though diverse narratives are available to the public, many do not make the *New York Times* bestseller list.

Future studies of this nature should examine the influence of the We Need Diverse Books movement on bestsellers within a new time frame, beginning in 2014—when the #WeNeedDiverseBooks diversity campaign first gained traction on Twitter—and covering a ten to fifteen-year time period. Further analysis of modern children's literature, and specifically diverse representation in this genre, is needed to track improvements or deficiencies in representation and continue to remind publishers, writers, and readers of the necessity of diversity and inclusion in literature. I might also recommend that the Cooperative Children's Book Center expand upon their current infographic to include the LGTBQ+ community.

Regarding representation of male and female characters in children's literature, it is my hope that authors and illustrators will continue working to rewrite the stereotypical narratives about women's roles in the U.S. and present young readers with female role models in an array of occupations.

The significance of children's literature, though historically challenged and undermined, has gained recognition for its ability to instill compassion and emotional development in young readers. As noted by John Locke, John Newbery, and Ursula Nordstrom, there is a need for authors, editors, illustrators, and industry professionals who believe in the inherent value of children's literature—and dare to revolutionize the industry by questioning the status quo. As Rudine Sims Bishop once stated, "Literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience" (1990). While gender bias and stereotypes continue to manifest in children's literature, consumers are also investing in narratives about subversive female protagonists who reject the expectation to remain static and, instead, speak out.

IX. Appendix 1



Sample of *New York Times*' bestsellers:

Weeks (Most to Least Recent)
May 12, 2019
May 6, 2018
May 7, 2017
May 1, 2016
May 3, 2015
May 4, 2014
May 5, 2013
May 6, 2012
May 1, 2011
May 2, 2010
May 3, 2009

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