ANALYSIS OF CHILDREN’S LITERARY CRITICISM: HOW
SCHOLARS EXAMINE GENDER, RACE/ETHNICITY, AND
SEXUALITY IN PICTURE BOOKS

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Analysis of Children's Literary Criticism: How Scholars Examine Gender,
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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to academic and non-academic minds. May they merge into one.
Stories for children are like dreams that we share with our kids. And since dreams can be rehearsals for reality, it’s important what roles they find to play in those stories.

–Alan Alda

_A Guide to Non-Sexist Children’s Books_

Woman is the Sleeping Beauty, Cinderella, Snow White, she who receives and submits. In song and story the young man is seen departing adventurously in search of a woman; he slays the dragon, he battles giants; she is locked in a tower, a palace, a garden, a cave, she is chained to a rock, a captive, sound asleep: she waits.

–Simone de Beauvoir

_The Second Sex_

Children’s Literature is a construct, something that is given shape through various sets of interactions between a great variety of influencing parameters.

–Sebastien Chapleau

_New Voices in Children’s Literary Criticism_
ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Analysis of Children’s Literary Criticism:
How Scholars Examine Gender, Race/Ethnicity, and Sexuality in Picture Books
by
Irina Chukhray
Master of Arts in Women’s Studies
San Diego State University, 2010

My thesis examines how scholars evaluate gender bias, representations of race/ethnicity, and sexuality in children’s picture books. I review scholarship analyzing picture books by focusing on studies published in the United States between 1970 and 2009. I explore the variables that scholars examine in picture books (e.g. appearance, personality characteristics, language, occupations, cultural representations). Basing my thesis on feminist theoretical framework by Kimberle Crenshaw and Deborah King, I investigate whether scholars evaluate picture books from a monist perspective (focusing only on one theme such as gender) or from an intersectional perspective (focusing on multiple themes such as gender, race/ethnicity, and sexuality). I also discuss the differences in how scholars evaluate picture books now compared to earlier studies in the 1970s.

My research demonstrates that most scholars examine children’s books from monist perspectives; they focus on one theme and some briefly mention other themes. My thesis is unique in that I evaluate the method of study that scholars utilize; I examine how and what in picture books scholars study. Most scholars follow the formula of summarizing previous research studies and then analyzing picture books. But unlike my thesis, not a single scholar has analyzed how other scholars examine picture books.

In conducting this meta-analysis, I discovered that scholars examining gender bias focused largely on quantity (frequency of female versus male characters) and quality (what roles female and male characters play). Scholars examining racial bias focused almost entirely on quantity (frequency of characters of color in books). Additionally, most scholars analyzing race/ethnicity focused on representations of African-American characters only. Very few studies examined multiethnic representations in general and very few studies examined representations of characters of color other than African-American. Scholars examining sexuality focused mostly on quality (whether or not gay/lesbian characters were portrayed positively) and none have focused on bisexual or transgender characters. In the final analytical section of my thesis, I evaluate six picture books from an intersectional perspective. Some of the books I chose to evaluate were examined by other scholars; I compare what they examined and what they omitted.
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Last but certainly not least, I would like to thank my support group: my family. To my dad, for your continuous support and unconditional love. To my mom, for your encouragement to always keep going and not look back. To my dearest partner, for encouraging me to “start working” on my thesis instead of relaxing the days away and for your patient love that caressed my often fatigued body and restless soul.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: SIGNIFICANCE, POSITIONALITY, AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Children’s books, defined as books aimed at elementary-school children, take the reader on an adventure into a different world where animals talk and magic is real. As a child I was fascinated with children’s books. I grew up with fairy tales such as Cinderella, Snow White, and The Frog Prince; as I got older I began to question the morals, the emphasis on beauty, and the happy ending of these stories. Even today I am still fascinated, but have reservations and a critical eye.

Research on children’s literature is very important because of the impact that books have on children. In their 1979 article, “Effects of Reading Content on Occupational Sex Role Stereotypes,” Knell and Winer note that stereotypical representations of male and female characters influenced children to act in stereotypical ways.1 For example, after reading stories in which characters were depicted in traditional roles—females as care takers of children, librarians, or secretaries and males as firefighters, doctors, and other similar masculine careers—girls preferred to play with a nurse’s kit than a doctor’s kit, saw themselves in typically feminine jobs in the future, and preferred to read stories portraying female and male characters in typical masculine and feminine roles. Conversely, in their 1979 article, “Children's Reactions to Textbook Stories in Which Females are Portrayed in Traditionally Male Roles,” Scott and Feldman-Summers report that depiction of female characters in non-traditional roles for girls and women broadened children’s perceptions about which activities girls could participate in and challenged their stereotypical assumptions.2 After reading each story, the children were asked “Who do you think can do what the main character did in the story?” (398). The children chose between five options: (1) only boys, (2) mostly boys, some girls, (3) same number of boys and girls, (4) mostly

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1 Other studies with similar results: Ashton; Schau and Scott.

2 Other studies with similar results: Scott (1986); Karniol and Gal-Disegni.
girls, some boys, and (5) only girls. The results indicate that after reading stories with mostly female main characters, children were more likely to choose the last option. These findings indicate that books contain the potential to influence young minds. Accordingly, analysis of children’s books is needed so that parents, teachers, and other educators will be able to identify negative influences in books and provide children with more progressive reading material. Children are potential feminists of the future. Therefore, by influencing their minds, one influences the progression of society in general and of women in particular.

Although a lover of children’s books since childhood, I was only recently introduced to critical analysis of children’s literature in an undergraduate Rhetoric and Writing Studies (RWS) course; we discussed analyses of fairy tales and I wrote an essay critiquing fairy tales. The RWS course introduced me not only to critical analysis of children’s literature but also to the world of research (in my mind, research was depicted as old white men in white lab coats). The RWS class and my professor, Dr. Catherine Hoffman, stirred a passion within me. Consequently, I did some minor research in which I analyzed popular children’s books in San Diego and in the process of building a literature review I noticed that many scholars approached children’s literature through a monist lens. Scholars seemed to evaluate children’s books with regards to gender, race/ethnicity, or sexuality. According to Michael Albert et al., authors of Liberating Theory, a monist approach assumes “that one particular domination precipitates all really important oppressions…[and] that important social relations can all be reduced to the economy, state, culture or gender” (9, his emphasis). In other words, the variables are examined independent of one another.

An intersectional approach, on the other hand, examines the interconnected relationship of the variables. In her 1989 article, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” Crenshaw describes how Black women are often excluded from feminist theory and antidiscrimination discourse because cases are analyzed via a “single-axis framework” (140). The single-axis framework does not allow for a multidimensional evaluation. Crenshaw emphasizes that the interaction between race and gender is not examined. As an example, Crenshaw cites a case in which a district court rejected a lawsuit on behalf of Black women. In the case summary, the court stated that the lawsuit should be against discrimination based on race or sex “but not a combination of both” (141). Crenshaw
provides an example of how Black women face multiple burdens by noting that sexism instructs women to be chaste while racist stereotypes expect Black women to be promiscuous.

In 1988, King described two types of intersectional approaches: additive and multiplicative. The additive approach adds variables together (i.e. racism + sexism + classism = triple jeopardy, or triple discrimination). The problem with the additive approach is that it assumes each variable “has a single, direct, and independent effect on status” (47). In this way, triple jeopardy is over-simplified and, as a result, other factors are ignored while the one factor with seemingly most weight and influence is focused on exclusively. King recommended an interactive model that accounts for multiple jeopardy. The multiplicative approach accounts for various simultaneous variables by multiplying the variables (i.e. racism × sexism × classism) and examining the various weights or influences of the variables. The main difference between the additive and multiplicative approach lies in the weight distribution with regards to analysis and focus of the reviewer. With the additive approach, researchers investigate multiple variables but focus on the one variable they deem to be most influential; without thoroughly exploring the impact of other variables; other potentially influential variables are only briefly mentioned. With the multiplicative approach, researchers investigate various variables simultaneously; they relay equal amount of focus on multiple variables and thoroughly explore their influences. After completing some minor research on picture book analyses and noticing that many of the scholars seemed to utilize a monist lens, I decided to expand my research into a thesis project in order to pursue my hunch that most likely the majority of research studies utilize monist lenses.

Since the 1970s there have been numerous published overviews of gender, race/ethnicity, and sexuality, respectively, in children’s picture books. My thesis will examine overviews published in the United States between 1970 and 2009. I will investigate the extent to which scholars analyze children’s books from a monist or intersectional (additive or multiplicative) angle. For example, studies by Weitzman et al., St. Peter, and Heintz examine only gender in children’s books; Nieto, Agosto, Hughes-Hassell and Gilmore-Clough examine only race/ethnicity; and Goodman as well as Jenkins and Morris examine only sexuality.
My approach will result in a meta-analysis of how scholars examine gender, race/ethnicity, and sexuality in children’s books. Although an ample amount of research on children’s books is available, a meta-analysis of children’s literary criticism is lacking.

My thesis will have three research questions. First, I will examine how published overviews of children’s picture books analyze and discuss gender, race/ethnicity, and sexuality, respectively. I will compare and contrast which types of books are included in the reviews and which themes are the focus of analysis. Secondly, I will evaluate the extent to which reviews are monist or intersectional. My final research goal is to examine any changes in the focus of reviews during the time period from 1970 to the present. This will allow me to map a historical timeline of research on children’s literature as well as an overall reflection of societal changes.
CHAPTER 2
HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

My thesis will focus on the time period between 1970 and 2009 in order to reflect the historical influences of the Civil Rights, feminist, and Gay Liberation Movements on children’s literature. The onset of the Civil Rights Movement is generally marked by Rosa Park’s refusal to give up her bus seat to a white man in 1955. The movement came into the national spotlight in the 1960s when well-dressed freedom riders testing laws prohibiting segregation at bus and railway stations were attacked and set on fire by hostile heckling white youth. The freedom riders caused a media stir, but the coverage led to more volunteer riders: positive images of Black youth helped alter whites’ negative perceptions of Black people (Collins 109-124).

THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

During the 1950s and 1960s, many poor Black people followed the Nation of Islam (NOI) and especially Malcolm X. When Malcolm X separated from NOI in 1963—the same year during which Martin Luther King Jr. delivered the famous “I Have a Dream” speech in Washington to an estimated crowd of 200,000—he maintained followers while NOI suffered in popularity. NOI assassinated Malcolm X in 1965 to eliminate an alternative to the organization yet the assassination gained him “the status of martyrdom” (Verney 120). This was fueled by his autobiography, published soon after his death, and accounts by others of his influence on the Black Power Movement. In 1966, the Civil Rights Act passed; the most controversial part of the act was Title VII which prohibited discrimination in employment based on race (Collins 75). Between 1965 and 1968, with continuous reports of racial violence and the horrors of the Vietnam War, Martin Luther King began to speak more radically and in 1968 he was assassinated (Verney 125). In an outcry of anger, riots sprang up in over 100 cities (Newman).

During the late 1960s, African-Americans began to gain political office in greater numbers. For example in 1967, Thurgood Marshall was the first Black justice to be appointed
to the Supreme Court. However, Mark Newman, author of *The Civil Rights Movement* (2004), emphasizes that at that time the majority of Black officials held “minor local offices…in small towns and rural areas” (144). As a result, Black elected officials had very little political power. Adding to frustration, school segregation, although illegal by 1969, persisted. Protests against desegregation, for jobs, and for students’ rights, continued into the early 1970s. The peaceful protests were met with violent police responses leading to further unrest within the Black community (Verney 120). The Civil Rights Movement allowed scholars to critically analyze literature based on racial representations and demeaning stereotypes. In fact, the Civil Rights Movement made women aware of their “second-class status” and prompted feminists to fight for women’s rights as well as rights for people of color (Collins 105).

**THE WOMEN’S MOVEMENT**

The feminist movement challenged the status quo via important publications such as Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) and with the formation of the National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1966. Friedan’s book and NOW openly challenged society’s expectations of women. During the 1950s and 1960s, the curtailment of women’s rights included limited financial autonomy without a husband’s or father’s signature and approval, lack of career opportunities other than traditionally sex-role appropriate areas such as nursing and teaching, no child care, as well as a lack of affordable and legal birth control. The messages given to young girls prompted an obsession about marriage; in 1960 the median age for marriage was 20 and over 60 percent of women dropped out of college to pursue it (Collins 7-38). Shifts were underway, however; in the 1960s and 1970s birth control became available, yet most U.S. states prohibited the sale or advertisement of any product related to birth control. Connecticut, for example, fined and jailed anyone “convicted of using, buying, or helping someone to acquire a birth control device” (162). Abortion was finally legalized in 1973 with the *Roe v. Wade* case; however, in 1976 Congress eliminated federal funding of abortions except when the woman’s life was in danger and thus severely limited poor women’s access to abortion. Women applied to (and were accepted into)

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3 Baxter; Chall, Radwin, French, and Hall; Taxel; Micklos.
advanced degree programs such as medical school. In general, the idea of women working became more acceptable to society at large and an evolving economy, placing greater value on the service sector, greatly added to the acceptance and eventual promotion of female workers.

Women’s relationship to paid labor was also changing. Women were encouraged to work during WWII when the government was short of labor, but were then expected to return home when the soldiers returned from the war (Collins 97). Additionally, mostly single women were allowed to work. In some situations, if a company found out about a secret marriage, the woman was immediately fired. After all, the presumption was that men were supposed to provide for families and a working wife was the sign of the husband’s failure to provide. Women did not have legal protection from job discrimination until the Civil Rights Act passed in 1964. The Act included a clause prohibiting employers from discriminating against workers based on sex.

By the 1970s, due to constant effective campaigns and protests, things were changing rapidly for women. Over 25 percent of medical students were women and generally most women went to school for academic degrees, not for MRS degrees (Collins 241, 261). The Feminist Press was founded in 1970 and just two years later Ms. Magazine was born. The magazine brought feminist awareness to women by publishing stories of “injury and injustice” against women. Additionally, women for the first time had roles of reporters in addition to those of secretaries or research assistants (89, 213-266). Also in 1972, NOW publically attacked sexist schoolbooks with the pamphlet Dick and Jane as Victims. The pamphlet described that in most textbooks, boys had the lead roles and were portrayed as very active while girls were portrayed as “dependent” and “passive” (Ravitch 86). The pamphlet caused a stir in the world of scholarly work and as a result numerous scholarly critiques of gender and sexism in children’s books appeared in academic journals. Additionally, most publishers created guidelines banning sexist language and stereotypes in books. Furthermore, Title IX passed in 1975, prohibiting sex discrimination in schools and thus banning discrimination in school sports (Collins 248-249).
THE GAY LIBERATION MOVEMENT

The Gay Liberation Movement is generally acknowledged to have begun with the Stonewall riots on June 27, 1969, when the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in Greenwich Village, New York, was raided by police. This sparked a riot by the gay customers that lasted for three days and consequently helped place the gay rights movement on the national radar screen (Adam 81-85). Prior to Stonewall, however, the movement had been building in different parts of the U.S. In 1962, U.S. states began repealing sodomy laws (D’Emilio 144). The late 1960s overturned laws prohibiting gay people from assembling and kissing in public. In 1967, the largest gay demonstration in the United States took place after a Los Angeles bar was raided and the bartender was hospitalized as the result of police brutality (D’Emillio 227). In 1963, sociologist Howard Becker published the influential book * Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*. Becker pointed out that the historical definition of “illness” was anything other than the norm. Thus, following this logic, same-sex sexuality is a sickness because the norm is heterosexuality.4 Becker then redefined “deviance” as “failure to obey group rules” and questioned the idea of deviance if by following the rules of group A in our society, one simultaneously breaks the rules of group B (Becker 8). Becker’s challenge of deviance influenced gay men and women to become activists and eventually challenge the medical profession in their assertion that same-sex sexuality is a mental illness. Another very influential author, called by some “The Mother of the Homosexual Movement,” was psychology professor Evelyn Hooker (White, “The Mother”). Hooker was one of the few mental health professionals studying “nonpatient, noninstitutionalized homosexuals” in the 1950s and 1960s. She found gay men to be no different from heterosexual men (D’Emilio 141). Her work was later referenced by the American Medical Association in their decision to remove homosexuality from the official list of mental disorders in 1973 (White, “The Mother”).

In the 1960s, more open literature about gay men and women appeared as censorship laws loosened. Some activists, fearing public indignation, did not believe the time was right for a mass gay movement, but the boldness and success of the Civil Rights Movement

4 He goes on to state “Divorce is illness because it signals failure of marriage” (6). This logic explains why divorce before the mid 1950s was such a shameful act.
inspired a militant gay movement in the mid-1960s. Franklin Kameny—fired from a government job in 1957 based on prior “charges of lewd conduct”—rose as the leader of the newly militant movement (D’Emilio 134, 149-150). Kameny urged the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) to fight for gay rights issues in 1962 and in 1964 the ACLU adopted gay rights issues. The ACLU boosted the movement by financially supporting legal cases. Like the Civil Rights Movement, media coverage played a positive role in this movement as well. The press helped reshape public views on same-sex sexuality and helped transform self-perceptions of the same-sex community. Inspired by the “beats” (poets and their followers) in San Francisco—who rejected the traditional family and other societal norms—gay men and women began to see themselves as rebels rather than deviants and began to move away from the shame instilled by society (D’Emilio 181). By the mid 1970s, more than 1,000 Gay Liberation organizations had formed.

The Civil Rights Movement opened a door for other movements such as the Women’s Movement and the Gay Liberation Movement. All three movements critiqued and challenged the status quo. Some groups fought for individual causes such as men in the Gay Liberation Movement fighting only for gay rights. And some groups fought for more fundamental causes that affected more than one category of people, such as lesbians in the Gay Liberation Movement. Barry Adam, author of *The Rise of a Gay and Lesbian Movement*, points out that lesbian activists in the 1970s tired of being left behind by the men in the gay movement who were only concerned with their own issues and did not pay attention to the needs of lesbians. Adam emphasizes the complicated atmosphere of this time period due to the fact that the Women’s Movement initially did not accept lesbians. Lesbian activists found themselves fighting for fundamental issues such as lesbian rights and women’s rights.

All three movements experienced a boom in Black/women/and gay-friendly literature beginning in the 1960s, and spanning the 1970s-1980s. Book authors began to explore and redefine their stories in congruence with current societal upheavals. In this body of work, I will focus on how scholars analyze gender, race/ethnicity, and sexuality in children’s literature, and provide my own analysis of texts from these tumultuous years.

The first research analyzing children’s books dates back to approximately the 1930s. Between the 1930s and 1940s, researchers focused on whether children preferred books with or without pictures, and if the latter, what kind of pictures children were interested in. These earlier studies solely attempted to define what kind of pictures attracted children; most scholars did not focus on the content of the books. For example, in 1953, Whipple set out to understand what interested children in pictures and found that children were most attracted to color pictures instead of black and white illustrations. She emphasized in the discussion section of her article that she did not evaluate the content of the stories or the message of the illustrations.

Other researchers focused on the impact of school readers on children. For instance, Jackson published “Effects of Reading upon Attitudes toward the Negro Race” in 1944. Jackson notes that few reading materials existed depicting African-Americans in positive ways; most materials presented African-American characters “as an object for laughter or at best as a kind of prize domestic animal” (48). For the purpose of her study, Jackson created a short story in which African-Americans were depicted non-stereotypically and provided this story to children in southern states. Jackson discovered that after reading the story, children were more likely to have a positive attitude towards Black people. Litcher and Johnson also focused on the impact of readers on children’s views. They provided children with multiethnic readers and, similar to Jackson, reported that multiethnic readers influenced children to view African-Americans more positively. Research on the impact of stories on children’s views and morals was most likely pertinent due to the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s.

By the late 1950s, scholars were aware that children understood sex-role socialization by the age of four. At that age, children already believed that a man’s primary role is to work outside the home and a woman’s primary role is to take care of the home and the children. Literature focusing on portrayal of characters in terms of gender bias seems to have started around the 1940s and 1950s. In 1946, for instance, Child, Potter, and Levine

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5 Melbo; Miller; Malter; Rudisill; Whipple.

6 Hartley (1959 and 1960).
published their examination of children’s books. They found female characters portrayed as submissive and dependent upon the male characters. Child et al. believed that literature may play a role in socializing children to fit in with society’s ideal of the passive woman and the active man. Following the example of the study by Child et al., other scholars examined school readers for biased portrayals of female and male characters. For example in 1968, Blom evaluated first grade readers and stated that children learn how to behave according to the traditional feminine and masculine models in the first grade readers. In 1969, Stefflre analyzed six readers and found that the majority of the material depicted male characters in occupations while female characters were rarely employed, especially if they were married. Additionally, Stefflre did not find a single depiction of an employed mother. Other studies of school readers, including more recent ones, examine the potential of readers to challenge students’ gender-stereotypical behavior and thinking.\(^7\)

A number of researchers throughout the 1940s and 1960s evaluated differences in boys’ and girls’ reading abilities. For instance, Samuels studied children’s reading levels in 1943 and reported that girls were stronger readers. Gates reported similar results in 1961 and Balow reported in 1963 that girls scored significantly higher on reader readiness tests than boys.\(^8\) Most research conducted between 1930 and 1969 did not necessarily focus on gender and racial bias, as most studies about children’s books do today. While reviewing past research examining children’s literature, I did not find a single study published before 1970 that evaluated representations of alternative families and/or gay/lesbian characters. This indicates a paradigm shift with regards to what scholars feel is an important subject to study.

My thesis will be an overview of literature analyzing picture books in the United States. I will focus on analyses from 1970 to 2009. During the last four decades, children’s literature has been heavily criticized for sexism, racism, and more recently, homophobia. Most research focuses on defining the age at which children begin to associate with pupils of

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\(^7\) Nicholas and Ochoa; Frasher and Walker; O’Donnell; Schnell and Sweeney; Scott and Feldman-Summers; Knell and Winer; Ashton; Schau and Scott; Scott (1986); Spitz; Karniol and Gal-Disegni.

\(^8\) Samuels and Balow tested children with the Gates Reading Readiness Test along with other tests.
the same gender (girls playing with mostly girls and boys playing with mostly boys),\(^9\) investigating the impact of books on children,\(^{10}\) assessing male versus female representation of characters in numbers and in stereotypical depictions,\(^{11}\) examining depictions of race and ethnicity,\(^{12}\) and analyzing depictions of sexuality.\(^{13}\) My thesis will primarily investigate how scholars have analyzed children’s picture books for gender, race/ethnicity, and sexuality themes and biases.

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\(^9\) Martin and Halverson; Martin and Fabes.

\(^{10}\) Scott and Feldman-Summers; Knell and Winer; Ashton; Schau and Scott; Scott (1986); Spitz; Karniol and Gal-Disegni.

\(^{11}\) Weitzman et al.; St. Peter; Kortenhaus and Demarest; Oskamp, Kaufman, and Wolterbeek; Gooden and Gooden.

\(^{12}\) Okada; Nieto; Turner-Bowker; Pescosolido, Bernice A., Elizabeth Grauerholz, and Melissa A. Milkie; Knoeller; Nilsson; Morgan.

\(^{13}\) Goodman; Jenkins and Morris; Chapman.
CHAPTER 3

METHOD

I review scholarship analyzing children’s books by focusing on studies published in the United States between 1970 and 2009; I limit my research to studies that analyze gender, race/ethnicity and/or sexuality. I focus on the following research questions:

1. What do scholars who publish overviews of children’s books focus on in terms of gender, race/ethnicity, and sexuality, respectively? For each dimension, which books are included? Which themes are the focus of analysis (e.g., appearance, personality characteristics, language, cultural background, relationships, the workplace, etc.)?

2. Are the overviews monist or intersectional?

3. How have these overviews changed over time from 1970 to 2009?

4. What are the effects of the feminist, Civil Rights, and Gay Liberation Movements on children’s literature?

I located the scholarly articles via the SDSU library website article search engine; specifically, I used JSTOR, MLA International Bibliography, and for a broader search I used Google Scholar. I implemented the following key terms: children’s literature, bias, sexism, racism, gender, children’s books, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, homosexuality, illustration, and picture. At this time, it does not appear that there is a website dedicated to criticism of children’s books. Nevertheless, I have been able to locate overviews of children’s books using these search engines.

I examine a select number of studies analyzing gender, race/ethnicity, and sexuality in chronological order by date of publication in chapters four through six, respectively. In chapter seven, I examine a few studies that attempt to analyze picture books intersectionally. Also in chapter seven, I analyze six noteworthy books that have received various nominal recognitions such as Caldecott and Newbery medals. I chose the books randomly based on publication dates; most of the books were published within the last ten years. I analyzed the books for representations of gender, race/ethnicity, and sexuality stereotypes. In chapter eight I discuss the general similarities and differences in the way that scholars analyze children’s picture books and make recommendations for future research studies. To locate recently published books dealing with gay and/or lesbian characters, I searched websites.
recommending such books because I did not find any recent studies analyzing the more recent books.
CHAPTER 4

GENDER: FREQUENCY, EMOTION, AND ACTIVITY

In the 1970s, when analysis of children’s literature became popular as is evidenced by the amount of works published during this time period, many scholars examined how children’s books represent gender. Considering that the second wave of the Women’s Movement took place during the 1970s, it is not surprising that many scholars analyzed women’s and girls’ representation in children’s books. One of the most common measures utilized by scholars was the frequency of male and female characters.

THE 1970S

One of the first scholars to analyze gender stereotypes was Nilsen in 1971. Nilsen inspected the titles of books, the illustrations of male versus female characters, character roles, gender of authors, and language limitations. Nilsen points out that the English language does not have neutral singular pronouns and thus authors must choose between the feminine and the masculine pronoun. Nilsen believes that most books, especially ones with animal characters, are “dominated” by male characters because authors do not have the luxury of utilizing neutral pronouns (921). She goes on to state that authors normally choose male characters for simplicity and because the masculine pronoun is often used to indicate both sexes. Nilsen identifies the social movement in the 1950s of pushing women out of factories and back into the domestic sphere as a possible explanation for authors either omitting female characters or depicting them in traditional homemaker roles. Nilsen also takes an intersectional approach to her study by exploring the stereotypic representation of Black female characters. For example, in Goggles, Keats writes a story about Peter and his sister; both characters are Black. Peter’s sister does not play an active role; she sits on the sidewalk, babysits, and draws while Peter and his friends play nearby.

In 1972, Weitzman et al. published the currently most well-known and cited study, "Sex Role Socialization in Picture Books for Preschool Children." Weitzman et al.
examined Caldecott and Newberry Medal\textsuperscript{14} winners as well as Little Golden Books—classic books—within the five years before the study. This study found that female characters were largely underrepresented by analyzing book titles, pictures, and character roles. For example, when looking at pictures, the results revealed that almost 92 percent of illustrations depicted male characters while only 8 percent depicted female characters. Weitzman et al. also reviewed animal representations in which the gender was obvious due to text or illustration and discovered that the ratio of male to female animals was 95:1 (1128). Weitzman et al. did not discuss the content of most of the books they analyzed. According to Blount, author of \textit{Animal Land: the Creatures of Children’s Fiction}, animals are often humanized in children’s stories in order to project values and morals that good boys and good girls should have (26). Because Weitzman et al. do not describe the animal stories they examined, it is not clear what morals or values the animal stories attempted to project.

Weitzman et al. focused on \textit{how} female characters were portrayed in the few instances that they did appear in the books. The study found that female characters held minor roles and ones that perpetuated gender stereotypes. Not a single female character was depicted in an occupation (1141). Instead, females were portrayed as helpless and in need of a male’s assistance—reinforcing the sexist concept that the man’s function is to protect the woman—or female characters were mothers or wives and thus the authors reinforced the idea that women’s only purpose is to take care of the family (1140).

Also, Weitzman et al. found that most male characters were involved in saving or rescuing others, especially animals and female characters. For example, in \textit{The Angry Moon} by William Sleator, the girl in the story, Lapowinsa, is saved by Lupan from her kidnapper, the moon. After he saves Lapowinsa, Lupan makes sure to climb down the ladder first “so that he could catch Lapowinsa if she should slip” (44). Sleater is not only representing girls as very delicate, he is emphasizing their helplessness. The image of Lupan helping poor, weak Lapowinsa is problematic because as, Trites, author of \textit{Waking Sleeping Beauty} points out, historically, female characters have only been developed if they were involved in relationships with other people. Weitzman et al. do not delve this deeply into analyzing the

\textsuperscript{14} Caldecott medals are awarded to books that demonstrate strong interpretations of a theme or concept and to receive the Newberry award, the book must make a “distinguished contribution to American literature for children” ("ALA | Caldecott Terms & Criteria"; "ALA | Newbery Terms & Criteria").
books but they do generally state that females are portrayed as helpless and only the male characters do the heroic saving.

In 1974, Hillman analyzed children’s books by looking at behavioral attitudes of characters, such as aggression. Hillman found that male characters were mostly portrayed as physically aggressive while females remained dependent. Hillman’s analysis explores “societal concerns” in relation to children’s stories. She notes that the Equal Rights Amendment and Affirmative Action Programs were a societal concern during the time that she completed her study. By definition, Affirmative Action Programs serve to “increase the representation of women and minorities” (Fullinwider, “Affirmative Action”). Interestingly, Hillman did not explore minority representation within her analysis; she only explored women’s representation.

**THE 1980s**

In the 1980s, Scott examined how male and female characters are stereotypically represented by analyzing two groups of books: those published between 1958-1970 and 1974-1976. Stories were evaluated by two people for the sex of the main character according to groupings (female main characters, male main characters, both female and male main characters, or neutral). The evaluators examined “role behavior” of the characters (traditional, nontraditional or mixed) (137). Although most books contained male central characters, the books that contained female central characters depicted the characters in nontraditional roles approximately seventy percent of the time. Surprisingly, male characters were mostly depicted in traditionally masculine roles. Scott believes that male characters are mostly portrayed traditionally because few scholars analyze male characters; most scholars examine female characters and as a result the pressure is for authors and/or publishers to change the way they portray female characters and not necessarily male characters.

In 1987, Hitchcock and Tompkins analyzed basal readers\(^\text{15}\) for female character visibility and frequency of appearance in occupations. During the same year, Dougherty and Engel analyzed Caldecott winners and honor books of the 1980s. They examined the appearance proportion of male and female characters, whether or not characters continue to

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\(^{15}\) Another term for school textbooks.
play traditional roles, and how researcher’s views have changed. Bringing attention to researchers’ views is a unique approach compared to other studies. Dougherty and Engel point out that the way researchers categorize male, female, and neutral characters has changed somewhat since scholars first began analyzing children’s books. For example, in *A Chair for My Mother* by Williams, children wore t-shirts and pants. Besides their clothes, there were no other indicators of gender and therefore they were classified as “neuter” (396). The researchers of this study point out that in the past if characters did not wear dresses, they were automatically classified as male but today’s standards allow both boys and girls to wear pants. The difference in our society’s outlook on clothes affects categorization and research results.

In 1989, Grauerholz and Pescosolido examined children’s books for a reflection of societal changes. Grauerholz and Pescosolido discuss the evolving roles women played during World War II, when they were allowed and encouraged to work, and after the war, when women were pushed back into the role of homemaker but some women remained in the workforce. Grauerholz and Pescosolido found that children’s books did not reflect employed—or even active—women. Children’s books continued to value traditional gender roles; reflection of societal changes was “at a substantial lag” (123). This study stands out because of the researchers’ awareness and attention to societal influences, but it is interesting that the researchers did not examine other societal movements such as the Civil Rights Movement and its impact on the female workforce. White women were pushed back into the homemaker role but women of color were employed before, during, and after World War II. Alternatively, in lesbian relationships, at least one partner in the couple would need to work. Discussion of representation of women of color and/or lesbian women would have improved the scope of this study and its analysis of the effect (or lack of effect) of societal movements on children’s books.

**THE 1990s**

In the 1990s, some scholars replicated the famous 1972 Weitzman et al. study. Clark, Lennon, and Morris, for example, examined Caldecott winners and honor books from the 1960s and late 1980s to see whether Weitzman et al.’s study had a “liberalizing” effect on the portrayal of characters in later published books (228). Clark, Lennon, and Morris expanded
on the 1972 study by not only examining Caldecott books, but by also inspecting Coretta Scott King winners from the late 1980s (an award presented to Black illustrators and authors since 1960). Clark, Lennon, and Morris went a step further and also investigated whether the race of the author affected the author’s representation of female characters. The study found that Black authors and illustrators emphasize bonds between women; women are represented as “less dependent and more competitive, emotional, persistent, and nurturant” (240). In general, the researchers found that female characters are more visible in King winners and runner ups than in Caldecott winners and runner up books. Of the 11 King books, the researchers identified 43 adult characters and 20, or 46 percent of those, were female; of the 16 Caldecott books, the researchers identified 39 adult characters and only 13 of those, or three percent, were female (Clark, Lennon, and Morris 235).

Clark, Lennon, and Morris conduct their study from a feminist perspective by inspecting the possible influence that race may play. They believe that the reason Black authors and illustrators portray women in a more progressive light may be due to the “values” that “self-described Black feminists” have compared to liberal white feminists (228). The values of Black feminists challenged “Black female subordination” which “resulted not simply from the oppressions of gender but from those associated with race and class as well” (229). Black authors create “realistic” and “culturally conscious” portrayals of the Black community (229). Lastly, Clark, Lennon, and Morris argue that Black authors and illustrators want to re-create the “all-White world” into the “all-Black world.”

Crabb and Bielawski published their study, “The Social Representation of Material Culture and Gender in Children’s Books” in 1994. Crabb and Bielawski analyzed “material culture” in character representations from Caldecott medal and honor books published between 1937 and 1989 (69). They define materials as “social representations” which are “classification systems” that allow us to understand and communicate with social groups (70). The representation of materials creates a connection between materials and gender stereotypes. For example, Crabb and Bielawski note that objects have gender markings which indicate to children whether the object should be used “exclusively” by females or males (e.g., feminine versus masculine toys) (70). The researchers believe this is a reflection of the influence of “gender-based division of labor characteristic of the industrial era” which are modeled for children by various sources (71).
Crabb and Bielawski tracked changes in depictions of characters with household and production artifacts. Household artifacts are “human-made objects used to produce effects in the home, including…in food preparation, cleaning, repair, family care, and home manufacture;” production artifacts are “objects used to produce effects outside the household, including…in construction, agriculture, transportation, and all other work outside the home;” and personal artifacts are a control group of “human-made objects not employed in labor and used to produce effects on the immediate person of the user, including artifacts used for grooming, protection from the elements, and leisure” (73). The results revealed very little change: male characters were mostly depicted with production artifacts and female characters were most frequently depicted with household or personal artifacts. The only change was a greater representation over time of male characters with household artifacts but female characters still greatly outnumbered male characters in this category. Although this study did not focus on the race or ethnicity of characters, interestingly, Crabb and Bielawski mention that the judges coding these artifacts were “two Caucasian female nontraditional students” (73). This statement reveals the scholars’ awareness of the potential influence race and ethnicity may have on research results but this awareness is omitted within their analysis of the picture books.

Writing from a feminist framework, Turner-Bowker locates the blooming of scholarly analysis of children’s literature in the 1970s partly as a result of the Women’s Movement. In her study, she analyzed “differential language” in titles, pictures, and central roles from Caldecott winners and honor books published between 1984 and 1994 (461). She states that descriptors in our language “maintain social and political inequalities between women and men” by labeling “typical” men with activity, independence, and aggression and labeling “typical” women with emotion, caring, and silence (463). She emphasizes that white heterosexual men are the standard against which all of us are compared, indicating the importance of issues of race and sexuality. However, she evaluates children’s books only on four points: “potency, activity, evaluation, and gender association” (461). Turner-Bowker does not connect these four points to issues of race/ethnicity or sexuality. She focuses almost exclusively on the effect of gender. For example, she investigated whether the gender of the

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16 Turner-Bowker analyzed the adjectives authors used to describe characters.
author affected his or her representation of characters and found that the author’s gender was
not an influential factor. She stopped at this point and does not explain what this may mean
in terms of how ingrained, justified, and normalized traditional gender roles are.

Similar to Turner-Bowker, Tepper and Cassidy examine the use of language with
male and female characters. Specifically, they wanted to determine if male and female
characters are associated with stereotypically feminine or masculine emotional language.
Tepper and Cassidy chose to analyze emotions because they can be recognized in newborn
babies and, as children begin to identify with same-sex models, they quickly learn which
emotions are appropriate to express. Unlike most studies, Tepper and Cassidy did not
evaluate medal-winning books; instead, they evaluated a sample of preschool children’s
books that were reported in a survey by parents reading to their children or watching over
what their children read. They wanted a sample of books actually read by children instead of
a sample of supposedly popular books, and they noted in their results that none of the parents
reported their children reading Caldecott books. Tepper and Cassidy evaluated the books on
the following emotional categories: “interest, enjoyment-joy, surprise-astonishment, sadness,
anger, disgust-contempt, fear-anxiety, shyness, shame, guilt-conscience-morality, and like-
love” (271-272). Although this study did not find a difference of emotional language utilized
in describing male and female characters, the researchers’ approach was unique. Considering
the publicity and availability of Caldecott and other medal-winning books, it would be
interesting for researchers to replicate this study with more well-known books. The study
does not indicate a demographic analysis of the participating families or any other survey
indicators as to the background information of the parents and children. The participants may
have been conscious of various biases in children’s literature and thus may have chosen
books for their children with great care. Interestingly, the researchers did not investigate
whether the parents or the children picked out the books the children read.

THE 2000s

I was surprised to find that the more recent studies of children’s literature relied
mostly on the same analytical measures as did previous researchers. In the article “Content
Analysis and Gender Stereotypes in Children’s Books,” Frank Taylor took a unique approach
in analyzing children’s books: he created an exercise in which his students had to analyze the
text, colors, characters, and themes in children’s books. Taylor stated that the goal of the study was to “uncover the dimensions of gender ideology present in books through the use of content analysis” but Taylor did not discuss the dimensions of gender ideology at great length (302).

For the most part, he analyzed traditional feminine and masculine traits. Taylor only hinted at more in-depth discussions with students from student reflection excerpts. One student noted that female characters were often portrayed in “pink bows and clothing…all the characters seemed white and upper class. All the troublemakers or everything that was evil or bad was colored in Black, while everything good and happy was colored in primary colors” (308-309). In another excerpt, a student noted that “children are introduced to racism, social class, and sexual roles at a very young age” indicating that these factors were issues brought up in discussion with the group (309). But Taylor does not develop or expand on these excerpts; in fact, in his review of the exercise Taylor does not mention the color of clothes, the skin color of characters, the class status of the characters, or anything outside of typical feminine and masculine traits. The reflections are the only clue that these influential factors were even discussed with students. Taylor employs no discussion of variables such as race or class affecting children in books. Although Taylor focuses on gender stereotypes in books, his omission of race and class as influential variables does not allow the reader to understand his analysis intersectionally, to understand what factors aside from the typical gender stereotypes affect the situation.

In 2009, Gooden and Gooden published a study that analyzed Caldecott winners. The researchers note the impact the Women’s Movement had on analysis of children’s books and begin by defining gender roles as roles that society teaches are “correct” for boys and girls. The researchers analyzed the main character, illustrations of humans and animals, and the titles of books. The results showed few books depicting males in nontraditional roles such as caring for children or grocery shopping. Only one book had a male character—a boy who went to a tea party and helped with laundry. Nontraditional activities for girls were more present, such as “dressing up as a pilot, ambulance driver, and scuba diver” (96). In their literature review, Gooden and Gooden cite research that examines representation of race and ethnicity in children’s books, but the scholars do not mention race or ethnicity (or other variables) in their discussion.
In her thesis “An Exploration of Gender Bias in Selected Basal Reading Series,” Consolo also does not take the extra step to discuss multiple variables affecting gender bias. Consolo based her research on the principle that children will be encouraged to read and will comprehend better what they read if they can relate to the characters in the stories. As evidence, she cites research indicating that children prefer to read stories with characters of the same gender. The themes Consolo explored were illustrations, characters, genre, content, and main characters’ characteristics.

Although Consolo states that she will examine illustrations, she does this by evaluating only the number of pictures with male and female characters. She used physical characteristics to determine the sex of the characters but did not discuss what the characters wore, their hair styles, or their body types; these factors are significant because male and female characters may have long hair, the same body type, and may wear similar clothes. In one instance, she describes how a female character in a book stands up for a bullied boy. Consolo does not discuss the physical characteristics of these two characters. Is the girl represented stereotypically? What are the characters wearing? How tall are the characters in the illustrations? The answers to these questions could significantly broaden the scope of this study.

Most importantly, Consolo evaluated only behavioral characteristics of characters such as how females are often depicted as “caring, helpful, and determined” while males are often depicted as “hard working and determined” (70, 76). Consolo does not expand beyond these characteristics that children can connect with such dimensions as race and ethnicity, sexuality, and class. She does not evaluate characters’ skin color, their clothes, their family structure, or their economic standing and thus limits her analysis to very specific points that have been evaluated by many scholars since children’s literature was first analyzed. I assumed that the year of publication (2009) and type of work (a thesis) would allow and encourage Consolo to analyze children’s books on a deeper and broader level.

One other thing that stood out in Consolo’s thesis is that when she describes the stories, she identifies characters by their race except when they are white. For example, she describes a story in which a “Mexican girl named Elena” goes against her father’s wishes. In other instances when the race or ethnicity is white, Consolo simply states “a boy” or “a girl”
(48). In the body of her thesis, Consolo does not discuss race or ethnicity but she clearly uses it to identify the characters to the reader.

Since the 1970s, most scholars analyze the same variables. Most scholars evaluate three points: how often female and male characters appear, what behaviors characters express, and what activities characters participate in. The few scholars that mentioned other variables such as race and ethnicity did so in a very superficial manner; the scholars did not thoroughly discuss the other variables, they merely mentioned them. Unfortunately, most analyses are limited to the three points that do not encompass a broad perspective.
CHAPTER 5

RACE/ETHNICITY: AUTHENTICITY AND FREQUENCY

During the 1970s, the number of scholars analyzing children’s literature greatly increased. Possibly as a result of the Civil Rights Movement, scholars increasingly analyzed children’s books for racial bias by reviewing the number of characters of color appearing in books, the roles the characters played, and the level of cultural authenticity depicted.

The 1970s

In the 1970s, similar to studies analyzing gender bias, several scholars evaluating racial bias in children’s literature focused on the number of times characters of various minority groups appeared in children’s books. For example, in 1974, Wunderlich examined twenty books from a children’s section in a Midwestern university library. Her analysis focused on whether authors depicted minority group characters positively or negatively. She noted that books depicting Black characters portray them from a “White value-perspective” (283). Unfortunately, she did not provide examples from the books she analyzed; her observations were generally very brief. Wunderlich was a substitute teacher for grades K-9 during the time she published this article; her training as a scholar and researcher is unclear but may be the reason that her analysis is not thoroughly developed. She stated that her intention was to analyze depictions of Black characters and characters of other minority groups. However, she focuses on Black characters solely and does not mention her findings of the other minority groups.

Unlike Wunderlich, Okada focuses on more than one issue and he thoroughly discusses the books he reviews. The 1976 study evaluates how sexism, racism, and class are represented in books containing Asian American characters. Okada notes that female characters are stereotypically depicted as “passive” while boys are stereotypically depicted as “active” (7). Boys play with “drums, trumpets, toy horses” while girls read stories and play with fans (7). Unfortunately, Okada does not discuss how Asian American characters
compare or contrast with typical representations of Anglo boys and girls. For example, are Asian American male characters portrayed as actively and aggressively as Anglo male characters? He does note, however, that Asian American characters are generally portrayed as passive in how they play and in how they handle situations. For example, in *Chinese Eyes* by Marjorie Waybill (1974), Becky (an adopted Korean girl) tells her mother that kids at school tease her and call her “Chinese eyes” (21). The mother comforts Becky by emphasizing that difference is a positive trait, but as Okada points out, the mother does not teach Becky how to deal with the name calling and thus “promotes a passive reaction” (22). The passive reaction only reinforces the stereotype that all Asians look alike. Okada examined the physical appearance of the characters and found that the majority of the books portrayed Asian Americans as people who “cling to ‘outworn’ alien customs” by wearing traditional clothes and traditional bowl haircuts (3).

Okada’s study stands out because he begins by defining Asian Americans as Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Vietnamese American. He then evaluates how children’s books depict Asian American characters with gender and racial bias. Okada does not deeply discuss how class is represented but he notes how the books seem to suggest that if *other* minorities “worked harder” they would “make it” too (3). The Asian American characters are depicted as successful depending on how well they have assimilated into middle class society. Okada’s study also stands out because he notes how the characters are portrayed very passively as Asian Americans and how female characters especially are portrayed passively. He did not provide any examples of aggressive Asian American characters; it is unclear whether this is an analytical omission or whether Okada did not find stories with such depictions.

Some scholars did not closely evaluate the contents of children’s books; they recommended books that are historically accurate or books that simply contain multicultural characters. For example, in 1975 Muse reviewed Black children’s books but she did not analyze them. Muse excitedly describes the “optimism” she feels when she sees a young boy reading John Steptoe’s *Stevie* or a young girl reading *A Teacup Full of Roses* by Sharon Bell-Mathis. She includes a bibliography of recommended books that she believes have contributed to children’s literature, specifically for Black children, but does not discuss the books. As a researcher, I was disappointed that some scholars did not always analyze or at
least discuss the books they recommended. The omission of their analyses limits my ability to investigate the scholars’ motivations and methods in choosing the books they recommended.

In 1978, Long published one of the first articles evaluating representation of interracial families in children’s books. He begins by reviewing the history of interracial marriages and points out that in 1968 the Supreme Court ruled the banning of interracial marriages unconstitutional. Although Long does not state this explicitly, he seems to imply that the progression of society such as the Civil Rights Movement influences children’s literature. Similar to Okada, Long defines his research focus on interracial families as families whose “members are of various racial backgrounds” but he does not thoroughly discuss the books (909). For example, he notes that in *Black is brown is tan*, the characters are not depicted in a sexist manner but does not explain how he came to this conclusion.

In 1979, Chall, Radwin, French, and Hall examined the quantity and quality of books containing Black characters published between 1973 and 1975. The scholars wanted to determine whether books omitted Black characters or used them on rare occasions. They believed that the increase of immigrant students in schools should have influenced children’s books containing multicultural characters. The study examined the roles Black characters played and what “settings, locales and situations” they were placed in (527). Although the study focused on the representation of African-American characters, the scholars mentioned that they were aware of other minorities but focused only on the Black community for this project. Specifically, they focused on the descriptions of Black people’s experiences. For example, they found that some books depicted slaves in a positive light as “high-spirited” and “smiling” (531). Additionally, the scholars compared the depiction of Black and white athletes. They found that books contained pictures of Black and white players but interestingly when the books were discussing athletic skills, the pictures were of white athletes only.

In 1979, McVaigh and Johnson looked at children’s literature from a unique angle. They analyzed play scenes in children’s books: whether boys or girls are more likely to play and the reason that they play. They analyzed a total of sixty-four books with play themes from a list of books in the *Elementary School Library Collection* published in 1974. McVaigh and Johnson found that boys were more often depicted in play scenes and they
played for fun while when girls were depicted in play scenes, they played for self-enhancement or social benefits such as being “friends forever” (26). To determine the reason that the characters played, McVaigh and Johnson analyzed the text for clues indicating the reason for the play scene. The scholars noted that children of color were largely underrepresented but when they did appear they did not play for fun, only white characters played for fun. Unfortunately, McVaigh and Johnson do not discuss what games the children played or what toys they played with. It would have been interesting to compare the types of games and toys characters played with in relation to the characters’ gender and race.

THE 1980s

In the 1980s, studies focused on the stereotype of foreigners looking alike. In 1981, for example, Aoki wrote an article about misrepresentation of Asian Americans and Asian immigrants. The example she uses is a book called *The Five Chinese Brothers*. The student who brings the book to her class states that the story is about Chinese brothers that are “kinda like you…your family is kinda Chinese or Japanese or something” (382). The student placed all Asians in one category and with this example Aoki argues that books must portray Asian Americans and Asian immigrants more accurately and less stereotypically. By evaluating a situation that affected her personally, Aoki wrote from a feminist perspective that allows and encourages one to place oneself within the research project.

In 1982, Nieto published a now often-cited article reviewing the representation of Puerto Ricans in fifty-six children’s books. Nieto’s study was intersectional: she evaluated the depiction of female and male Puerto Rican characters. She found that female characters were often depicted in an “insignificant or secondary role” and the books often reinforced the stereotype of the “emotional and hysterical Latina” (8). At the time of her study, not a single female character was depicted in a professional role or in any role that fights oppression. Male characters were depicted stereotypically as “strong” and in command of their surroundings (9). Unfortunately Nieto did not look at representations of social class in the children’s books.

Nieto also noted that several books disparage people of color. For example, a dog was described as “an old Indian trying to make a war cry when he barks,” and Native Americans were generally referred to as “hostile Indians” (9). Nieto’s study stands out in that she takes
Nieto noticed that many characters wanted to assimilate into the general society; Puerto Rican culture was belittled while dominant U.S. culture was “extolled” (6). Nieto cites examples of books in which the main characters hate Spanish music and are “humiliated by almost anything that is Puerto Rican” (6). Male characters often expressed a desire to go to California, for example, “where the beautiful girls are” indicating that Puerto Rican girls are not beautiful. These kinds of statements push young readers to assimilate and devalue their ethnic origins.

In 1985, Sims briefly analyzed books written about Black people by Black and non-Black authors. She finds that Black authors represent Black characters more authentically than non-Black authors. Her analysis of the books is very brief but she does mention that Black characters by Black authors are represented “within a range of economic, geographic, philosophic, and linguistic realities” (11). Sims focused mostly on the author’s race, the cultural accuracy of the books, and the number of books that focused on Black people’s experiences in the United States. Mainly, she focused on the topics covered in children’s books such as history, relationships, and racial conflict. She did not evaluate gender, racial biases, or other biases.

**The 1990s**

During the 1990s, scholars continued to review the number of books with ethnic minority group characters, the authenticity of the depictions, and ethnic minority experiences. Bishop published a study in 1990 in which she analyzed the “themes, issues, and trends apparent” in children’s books (556). Additionally, she analyzed the number of books with Black main characters and the number of books focusing on the Black experience. She found that less than two percent of all children’s books have Black main characters or focus on Black life. Bishop also identifies common themes in books with Black characters such as relationships, a sense of community, African-American history and heritage, as well as strength and survival. Bishop noted that many books published after the mid-1980s contain Black characters but the stories are not about Black experiences, they are about everyday experiences.

In 1990, Harris also examined how the Black experience is depicted in children’s books. But in addition, she looked at physical stereotypes depicted in illustrations. For
example, she notes that early nineteenth century books were “replete with stereotypes” (541). Illustrations of African-Americans portrayed them with “protruding eyes and large, red lips, extremely dark skin, and, in the case of males, long, gangly arms” (542). Harris found that books published between 1940 and 1970 were assimilationist in nature; they no longer focused on depicting the Black cultural experience. Authors instead depicted African-American characters in similar activities to those in which white characters were depicted, such as playing with friends or attending picnics. Harris believes the increase in stories with “subtle use of race” is due to society’s push to integrate the Black and white communities during this time period. In examining books published in the 1970s and 1980s, Harris notes that a greater number of authors produced culturally conscious stories that deal with Black youth and their experience growing up in the United States. The more recent books also seem to encourage pride in being Black. Although for the most part Harris focuses on the content of books with Black characters, she also focuses on the number of books published per year by African-Americans or about African-Americans. She found that since 1970, there are about 200 books published annually that discuss Black experiences. Harris points out that this number has stayed relatively constant over the last two decades.

In 1992, Gillespie, Clements, Powell, and Swearinger analyzed the portrayal of people of color in Newbery award-winning books. Their focus was to determine which books contain major or minor characters of various ethnic backgrounds and how the characters are depicted. They looked at the following groups: white, Black, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, or American Indian or Alaskan Native. Unlike previous authors, Gillespie et al. did not define Hispanic or Asian. The study focused on whether the characters were portrayed in a “positive, negative, balanced, or neutral” manner (112). The scholars listed the books they analyzed, stated whether they determined the book to be positive, negative, balanced, or neutral, and briefly summarized the books, but did not explain how they determined the way in which the characters were portrayed. In the conclusion, Gillespie et al. mentioned the stereotypes they found. For example, they found that some books portrayed Chinese characters as “greedy, violent, and deceitful” (116). But while summarizing each book, the scholars did not mention current stereotypes.

In 1993, Short et al. published a study in which they review books that focus on the U.S. Southwest. They point out books that challenge stereotypes such as *The Diving Bell* by
T. Strasser. Strasser discusses the struggle of the Mayan descendants via a strong female main character that breaks the traditional expectations of women by not simply accepting what is happening but by attempting to understand why “her people are being destroyed” (249). Short et al. also note some books which contain stereotypes. For Example, in Ten Little Rabbits, the author presents American Indians in a stereotypically “monocultural” way; she depicts them as all looking alike. Short et al. could have improved their study by closely examining all of the books they discussed. For example, they summarize a book called Black Widows. The book is about spiders and how they are not that scary. The main character, an eight-year-old girl, states how she finds spiders interesting and not “weird” (245). Short et al. included this quote in their summary but did not evaluate it. The author of the book, Peter Murray, depicts a strong female character challenging the stereotype that girls are afraid of spiders, that insects are only interesting to boys because they are “icky” and boys are “icky” as well.

In 1994, Cai surveyed 73 picture books. She focused on how Chinese and Chinese Americans are represented in the content of the stories and in the illustrations. She finds that several books represent Chinese characters as an “amorphous mob, all with yellow skin, slanted and slit eyes” (170). Cai takes note of the themes authors explore such as marriage (free love versus arranged marriage). She analyzes whether or not the stories represent authentic accounts of China. For example, in one story a god informs a young man that he will marry a woman when she is old enough. The young man must wait for her to mature. The young man initially does not wish to marry the girl, but in the end they marry and live together happily. Cai notes that this story authentically represents the values of China, but she does not take her analysis a step further and evaluate the meaning behind stories or the traditional expectations portrayed in the stories. Cai does not question, for example, whether the girl in the story wanted to marry the young man or whether the young man wishes to get married at all. The focus of Cai’s analysis is cultural authenticity; she does not examine representations of gender or racial bias.

In 1997, Pescosolido, Grauerholz, and Milkie studied the appearance, disappearance, and reappearance of African-Americans in over 2,400 children’s books. Pescosolido et al. studied Caldecott winner books, Children’s Catalog books, and Little Golden Books between 1937 and 1995. They found that images of African-Americans were present somewhat
between the 1930s and 1950s but then diminished until 1964. Images of Black people reappeared from the late 1960s to early 1970s. Most notably, the scholars found that books with African-American characters disappeared during times of racial conflict and reappeared after the conflict.

Pescosolido, et al. noted how representations of Black characters changed over time. For example, *Little Fellow* by Marguerite Henry was first printed in 1945 with an illustration of a dark African-American male. The character spoke with a stereotypically uneducated accent. The same book was reprinted in 1975. In the later version, the character was still African-American but was dressed in wealthier attire and spoke with educated speech or, as Pescosolido et al. describe, he spoke “White, Irish, and speaking brogue” (461). Interestingly, the character in the reprinted book became a much lighter-skinned African-American.

Pescosolido et al. do not note this difference in their analysis; the pictures, however, clearly show a difference in the skin shade of the character. Pescosolido et al. also noted the themes in children’s literature with Black characters and found that more recent books contain a greater number of African-American characters but racial issues are not discussed explicitly.

Interestingly, Pescosolido et al. do not discuss gender stereotypes in children’s books explicitly. For example, the scholars discuss a book called *The Snowy Day* by Jack Ezra Keats and they note that others have critiqued the depiction of the boy’s mother as a “mammy” (452). This happens to be the only mention in the article of gender portrayal and Pescosolido et al. do not reveal their opinion of the boy’s mother; they simply summarize what other critics have said.

**The 2000s**

Since the 1970s, many scholars have focused on the portrayal of African-Americans in children’s books. Few have focused on the portrayal of Asian Americans, Native Americans, Latinos, and other minority groups. In recent years, more focus has been placed on the portrayal of Native Americans. For example, in 2003, Nina Lindsay published an article in which she examines how accurately books portray Native American culture. Lindsay found that Native American culture has been portrayed somewhat accurately but historical portrayal has been largely inaccurate. Lindsay found that “nearly every recent
book” depicts a “Hollywood-happy” Thanksgiving (43). Linsday does not reveal how many books she reviewed and what other strengths or weakness they contained.

In 2005, Nilsson reviewed Hispanic portrayal in recent books. Her approach is unique in that she did not review the books herself; Nilsson reviewed some of the most well-known articles that analyzed Hispanic portrayal in children’s books. The purpose of her study was to determine whether Hispanic characters are accurate and multidimensional. She reviewed studies published between 1966 and 2003; she examined studies that noted the number of Hispanic character appearances, the roles the characters play, and gender or racial stereotypes. She defined the term “Hispanic” as of Puerto Rican, Mexican, Mexican American, Spanish American, Cuban, and Central or South American origin. She noted that some studies analyzed bilingual books (books that contain English and Spanish words) and, interestingly, the authors of those studies did not mention whether or not they were analyzing bilingual language. In reviewing gender stereotypes, she found that female characters are still portrayed less often than male characters and females appear more submissive. However, she noted an increase in the depiction of more educated female characters. Nilsson also found that studies indicate a need for more books representing Mexican Americans living in upper-class neighborhoods; the majority of books represent Mexican American living in poor neighborhoods.

Since the 1970s, most scholars analyzing representation of race/ethnicity examine the number of books depicting people of color, how accurate the stories are of the groups’ experiences and culture, and physical stereotypes pertaining to certain minority groups. The strongest emphasis seems to be on identity via historical accuracy and the minority groups’ experiences. Few studies examined gender in addition to race. Interestingly, although some studies touched upon interracial relationships, not one study touched upon non-traditional families or sexuality. This is most likely an indication of omission in children’s books but this is also an omission in the scholarly literature.
CHAPTER 6

SEXUALITY: POSITIVE PORTRAYALS

Relatively few scholars have analyzed children’s picture books for representation of gay and/or lesbian characters or themes related to same-sex sexuality. Scholars that have analyzed books for themes related to sexuality examine mainly what roles gay and/or lesbian characters play, how many gay-themed books are available, and what sex the characters are. Several scholars noted that at this time no pictures depicting gay children are in existence.

Some scholars noted other representations in children’s literature such as racial diversity and economic status. For example, in 1983 Jenkins and Morris noted the separation theme in *When Megan Went Away*, a story about the separation of lesbian lovers. Jenkins and Morris also noted that some of the illustrations depicted racial diversity and the “income-level” of the average household headed by a woman (16). Jenkins and Morris reviewed several other books that contained lesbian characters as well as characters of various backgrounds, body shapes, and ages. Interestingly, Jan Goodman published her article on lesbian and gay characters during the same year and in the same journal. Goodman also reviewed *When Megan Went Away* but did not mention representation of racial diversity or income level. Goodman noted, however, that all of the characters were lesbian and that there were no depictions of gay characters at that time.

In 1998, Kidd investigated lesbian and gay literature for children and young adults. He discusses how many gay and/or lesbian-themed books portray positive images of non-nuclear families, but he points out that there is yet to be a picture book depicting a gay or lesbian child due to the heteronormative belief that same-sex sexuality is “incompatible” and “antithetical” with childhood. Kidd indicated that most gay-themed books portray the characters in close friendships rather than in partnered relationships. For example, in one book a mole and a rat are the best of friends.\(^\text{17}\) While going down the river on a boat, they...

\(^\text{17}\) Kidd identified the sex of the animals via the authors’ use of personal pronouns such as “he” and/or “she.”
“[mess] around” and later when another character put Mole and Rat to bed, the two “tumbled in between the sheets in great joy and contentment” (115). Kidd’s students often accuse him of “reading too much into things,” but he believes that the words of the story give away the author’s hidden meaning.

In 2000, Spence analyzed the availability of children’s books related to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) issues. Spence investigated the number of titles targeted towards preschool and elementary school children and which titles are most commonly available in the libraries; he also analyzed the “prominence” of gay characters, the level of discussion about same-sex sexuality, and if the characters were presented in a positive or negative manner (337). In analyzing the content of the books, Spence found that most gay characters are presented in supporting roles, and most books present same-sex sexuality in a positive manner by encouraging “acceptance and tolerance” (360). Spence did not examine the representation of characters of race and ethnicity in books with gay and/or lesbian characters, but he did note nontraditional family structures such as “divorced parents, stepparents, and adoptive parents” apart from same-sex couples (345). Unfortunately Spence did not note the proportion of books with gay characters versus lesbian characters; such a comparison could potentially provide insight into gendered representations of same-sex sexuality.

In 2001 Clyde and Lobban published their article, “A Door Half Open: Young People’s Access to Fiction Related to Homosexuality.” Clyde and Lobban examined what roles gay and lesbian characters play and the gender of the characters. To determine the roles that gay and lesbian characters played, the scholars analyzed how many were main characters, supporting characters or background characters. The results revealed that the majority of books had supporting gay and/or lesbian characters and most of the characters were male. Examining the number of books available, Clyde and Lobban found that by 1999 only thirty-two books containing gay and/or lesbian characters or themes were available and the majority of those books were about children living with gay and/or lesbian families.

In looking at how the characters are represented, Clyde and Lobban noted that in children’s books, gay characters tend to be “conservative;” they are “very ‘straight’ gay, not effeminate,” potentially implying that while being gay is becoming more acceptable, having non-traditional gender roles is not (23). In their conclusion, the scholars note that there are
“no books targeted at slow or reluctant readers” (27). Throughout their article, the scholars focus solely on the representation of same-sex sexuality, but their acknowledgement of the authors’ target population implies that the scholars are concerned for or are aware of children with learning disabilities. Clyde and Lobban unfortunately did not analyze the representation of characters of color in the illustrations.

In 2002, Huskey investigated how gay and/or lesbian characters are represented in children’s books and the potential reasons for the way that the characters are depicted. Huskey points out that most picture books present gay and/or lesbian characters “connected by family ties to nonsexual, presumptively latently heterosexual child/children” and not a single book depicts gay children in order to avoid what she calls the “pernicious myth of recruitment,” that is, parents’ homophobic fears that books with gay/lesbian characters will encourage children to become gay or lesbian (68). Huskey points out that most gay-themed books do not contain attractive illustrations, and she suggests that this may be due to fear of critics attacking the so-called seduction of children into non-heterosexual thoughts and behaviors.

In her content analysis, Huskey notes how some books imply gay and/or lesbian characters by presenting them as close friends while other books present “uncloseted” characters (72). For example, in The True Story of Wonder Woman by Simonsen, Huskey notes how a group of females living on an island represent lesbian women. She emphasizes that small details in the illustrations hint at same-sex sexuality. One illustration, for instance, depicts the queen of the Amazon tribe with a baby in her arms. Huskey believes images such as this hint at a lesbian relationship. Huskey’s overall analysis stands out from other scholars in that she brings to light representations of gender as well as same-sex sexuality. She notes that Simonsen presents the female tribe as “brave, strong women” who stayed immortal as long as men did not step foot on the island (72). She questions why such “strong” women would be “vulnerable” to the presence of men and finds that Simonsen falls into the trap of presenting lesbian characters stereotypically as “nonviolent [and] committed to social justice” (74). Huskey believes that by depicting lesbian women vulnerable to the presence of men, Simonsen hints that some women are lesbian because they are unhappy with men.

Most of the research that analyzes non-nuclear families in picture books does not focus on quantity (i.e. numbers of gay and/or lesbian characters). Most researchers seem to
focus on quality—in what manner the characters are represented, whether the depictions of
lesbian and/or gay characters are stereotypical, and what kind of relationships the lesbian/gay
characters have. Surprisingly, I did not find any articles analyzing the depiction of bisexual
or transgendered characters in picture books. While this omission may be due to a dearth of
pictures representing bisexual and/or transgendered characters, it is interesting that not a
single scholar mentioned this omission. This omission is possibly due to the belief that
bisexual and/or transgender characters are too fringe to explore, they are not as acceptable as
lesbian and/or gay characters, and they are just too much for children to understand. But
these rationales are unacceptable because they foster invisibility and shame.
CHAPTER 7

INTERSECTIONALITY: GENDER × RACE/ETHNICITY × SEXUALITY

Of all the articles I analyzed, a small number of studies focused their analysis on more than one theme. In the articles I described in the previous chapters, scholars focused on one theme (gender, race/ethnicity, or sexuality), and some of the scholars briefly mentioned representations of other themes. In the following two sections, I will discuss the articles that analyze multiple themes in children’s picture books, and in the second section, I will analyze a few children’s books intersectionally. I chose the books for analysis randomly based on their publication date. I focus on recent noteworthy books published within the last decade: Caldecott winners, Newbery winners, and New York Times bestsellers, Little Golden Books, and ALA\textsuperscript{18} Notable Children’s Books.

INTERSECTIONAL ARTICLES

In 1972, Prida et al. examined the portrayal of women in 100 children’s books on Puerto Rican themes. They analyzed the appearance of female versus male main characters in stories and discovered that, of the 100 books, thirty-two contained male central characters and eighteen contained female central characters. Prida et al. note that publishers prefer books with male central characters because such books are more “profitable” (7). Prida et al. found that the majority of the books reinforce traditional stereotypes of women, especially Puerto Rican women. They noted that all of the books they analyzed were written by non-Puerto Rican authors and that Puerto Rican female characters were more “constricted” to stereotypically female roles than white female characters (7).

Prida et al. analyze representations of racial and gender bias throughout their study. The scholars investigated the portrayal of female and male characters with regards to their

\textsuperscript{18} American Library Association.
activities, behaviors, and dress; Prida et al. also noted the skin color of the characters and the type of toys they played with. In analyzing books targeted at children four to seven years old, the scholars discovered that the majority of the books depicted “brunette and dark-skinned” girls playing with “blond and fair-skinned” dolls (7). And all of the female characters wore dresses. The same types of books with male central characters portray boys as very active and in some cases “heroic” (7). The scholars found a small number of books portraying heroines, but even these characters are portrayed stereotypically: they participate in stereotypically feminine activities such as “gardening” and “sewing,” they are “sweet” and “docile,” they are ordered around by brothers and fathers, and they wear dresses at all times (7). Prida et al. note that fathers are represented as “supreme commanders”; they are “waited on and catered to” by the women and girls in the family (7).

Furthermore, Prida et al. inspected how mothers are portrayed in children’s books and found that most of the characters were full-time housewives or were housewives with poorly-paying jobs. All working mothers took care of the house and children after they came home from work. Prida et al. state that these books teach young girls that when they get married, they can expect to work full time as housewives and/or as housewives and “low-income, low-skilled” workers while taking care of children at the same time (8). In closely analyzing the books, Prida et al. discovered several patterns: some books used a few Spanish words and the words are mostly spelled incorrectly. Additionally, several books focus on themes of “adjustment-to-America” (8). For example, in one book, the Puerto Rican family worries about fitting in. The father continuously talks about the day that he will get rich, and at one point the family sells an antique doll to have more money. Prida et al. emphasize that the selling of the doll indicates the selling of the family’s culture in their attempt to survive in the dominant society. The white characters tell the Puerto Rican characters that once they learn to speak English, “everything will be all right” (8). Prida et al. also noted that several books “lack authenticity” (8). For example, in one book, a Puerto Rican girl is given a hot dog and she acts as if this is the first time she has seen one.

Even the heroines submit to a patriarchal structure. Prida et al. also point out that most of the books portrayed Puerto Rican girls as the smartest children in their classes. The scholars note that although it is good that authors are depicting educated female characters,
the authors depict the characters in a racist manner by creating characters that must always be the best and must always excel in order to prove that they belong.¹⁹

In 1992, Bunkers surveyed 100 children’s books in an attempt to investigate how representations of families have or have not changed along with societal changes. Bunkers begins her article by describing how she grew up in a very traditional family with five children, a stay-at-home mother, and an employed father. When she discovered that not everyone had two parents or parents of the opposite sex, she became interested in children’s books that depicted alternative families. Bunkers analyzed books from public and university libraries as well as from bookstores. In her observations, she found books depicting single parents, stepfamilies, adoptive and foster families, as well as lesbian and gay families. She also noticed that many books portray families with “physical, mental, and emotional challenges” such as job loss, poverty, sexual abuse and deaths in the family (116). For example in Please Tell, a young girl who was sexually abused states how her uncle and godfather “hurt” her when she was only four years old (Bunkers 124). Bunkers also identified several books with differently-abled characters such as the story of a young girl in a wheelchair in Rachel and the portrayal of an interracial friendship between an African-American boy and a developmentally impaired young Caucasian boy in My Friend Jacob (125). Throughout her article, Bunkers discusses picture books that challenge sexism, ablism, racism and several other issues.

In 1996, Albers analyzed Caldecott Medal winners between 1984 and 1995 for gender stereotypes and racial bias. She begins her essay by acknowledging that she used to read books to her middle school students with male central characters specifically in order to grab the boys’ attention so that they would not act up in class. She would even compose stories with strong male characters and weak female characters. But after reading feminist literature, she realized that she was reinforcing racial and gender bias unconsciously because of society’s pressures through media and literature. She cannot recall reading any stories in her youth without a male author, illustrator, or protagonist. Albers emphasized that analyzing

¹⁹ When schools integrated in the U.S., African-American youth experienced great pressure from white teachers to perform and to prove that they belong. bell hooks, for example, discusses her experience with integration while growing up in Teaching to Transgress.
books for equity and inclusion (how many female versus male characters) was not enough; researchers must interpret representations of gender and race.

In closely analyzing the Caldecott winners, Albers asks pertinent questions with regards to historical accuracy and its relationship to gender stereotypes. One story, for example, takes place in the 1800s, and the female character is portrayed traditionally as “nurturing and caring” (274). The illustrations depict the female character with a “sponge and laundry basket in hand” (274). Albers then questions whether historical accuracy—most women were homemakers in the 1800s—justifies authors’ lack of challenges to traditional representations of women. Although Albers questions authors that do not challenge stereotypes, she does not seem to be aware of how some of her analyses are biased. For example, Albers summarizes *Owl Moon* as a story about a father and his daughter going out in the winter to find a great horned owl. Albers notes that the illustrations of the daughter are androgynous, and she finds this “troublesome” (275). She notes that the author did not provide textual clues as to the character’s gender; the only clue that Albers identified was the girl’s pink jacket and scarf. Pink is traditionally associated with femininity, but one cannot determine for certain that a pink jacket and scarf imply that the character is female. Albers believes that the author and illustrator may have chosen to portray an androgynous character so that “young boys could identify” with the main character. Albers does not address her discomfort with an androgynous character; she does not recognize that androgynous-appearing people are also oppressed and that this book actually challenges criticisms of androgyny by representing a strong androgynous character.

Albers claims to examine representations of gender, race, and class, but she mentions class only in one book that focuses on the life of a white janitor. Albers points out “being a blue-collar worker is not glamorous or satisfying” (278). The janitor takes advantage of an opportunity to give up his old life and go on an adventure; he goes on the adventure but in the process loses his dog, his best friend Eddie, and as a result he returns back to his old life. It is interesting that Albers examines class representation only in this situation; she does not examine class representation in other books. Just because a book does not deal specifically with a person’s job does not mean that class is not represented. One should examine the illustrations for clues of class status in relation to the character’s clothing, portrayal of their house or room, etc.
In 1997, Ramirez and Dowd analyzed how female characters of Mexican descent are represented in children’s books published between 1990 and 1997; they perused book titles, illustrations and text. They found that few female characters are portrayed as leaders in the home; in most stories, the man controlled what happened. However, the majority of female characters, approximately seventy four percent, were portrayed as “strong and enduring” (22). Ramirez and Dowd point out that previous researchers found most female characters to be weak and thus the recent findings are encouraging. They also analyzed the behaviors of characters and noted that books published between 1990 and 1997 contained a much smaller number of female characters stereotypically “prone to emotion” such as helplessness (23). Ramirez and Dowd also analyzed the plots of the children’s books and found that a large number of plots deal with contemporary issues such as “immigration, bilingualism, migrant labor, economic issues, prejudice, discrimination, intercultural marriage, and adoption” (23). As an example, Ramirez and Dowd discuss a book called *Pablo’s Tree* and note that the story is about a family that celebrates the adoption of their son. The story also discusses immigration; the main characters cross illegally into Texas “in search of conditions better than in Mexico” (23). Ramirez and Dowd did not analyze the living conditions of the characters in the story before or after they migrated to Texas. This would have been an excellent opportunity to discuss class representations. They do, however, note in general that the books they analyzed contain few representations of characters living in poor neighborhoods.

Lastly, in 2001 Sands-O’Connor analyzed how picture books represent different families. Surprisingly, she found that most books emphasized the differences between couples even if the couples were multiracial but from the same country. For example, the books emphasized the different foods the characters ate, the difference in physical features, and difference in speech patterns. In comparison, Sands-O’Connor examined books with gay parents and noted that the emphasis was not on difference but instead on similarities: how the partners are similar, how they enjoy similar activities, and how affectionate the partners are. Sands-O’Connor points out that most books do not represent affection between couples, especially interracial couples; the emphasis is on family, but books with gay couples tend to show affection between the lovers such as hugging and kissing. Most of the picture books Sands-O’Connor finds portraying affection are more recent works; thus, the portrayal of
affection, in general, may be influenced by the more recent social acceptance of sexuality. And the books with gay and/or lesbian characters analyzed by Sands-O’Connor were written beginning in the late 1980s.

**Intersectional Analysis**

I analyzed six books that were either Caldecott winners or honor books, Newbery winners, Little Golden Books, *New York Times* bestsellers, books recommended for children of gay and/or lesbian parents, or books recommended by the American Library Association.

*Little Mommy* by Kane is a Little Golden Book; it was originally published in 1967 and was rereleased in 2008. The book is about a young girl who takes care of her three dolls as if they were her children. The girl is portrayed as a traditional housewife: she spends the day cleaning the house, cooking, and taking care of the children. She stays at home while a boy, the daddy, goes to work in the city; interestingly, the reader never learns the name of the girl or anything about her family. The reader only knows from the illustrations that she is blond and has blue eyes. All the characters in the book are white. The illustrations indicate that the girl lives in a large home with a front and back yard; she is most likely middle class.

*Little Mommy* was originally published in 1967; the late 1960s and early 1970s are the years that the Women’s Movement was in full force. This book was likely written as a backlash to the movement with the goal of encouraging parents to instill traditional values in their children, especially in girls. But why would a book encouraging young girls to prepare for domestic life be reintroduced in 2008? Considering that Little Golden Books have been around since 1942, it is possible that they still cater to families valuing the traditional nuclear family. Little Golden Books are considered classics; thus it is also possible that the publisher (Random House), does not wish to meddle with the classics that are traditionally loved by children and their traditional parents. In 2008, California passed Proposition 8 which restricted the definition of marriage to that between one man and one woman. Random House may have rereleased this book as a show of support for the passing of

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20 Betts, Wendy E. "Rainbow Reading: Gay and Lesbian Characters and Themes in Children's Books."
21 “Little Golden Books” in Works Cited
22 “Proposition 8” in Works Cited
Proposition 8 and/or as a strategy to encourage people to vote for the proposition. Ultimately, the rerelease of Little Mommy indicates the ongoing homophobia our society continues to struggle with.

In 1972, William’s Doll by Zolotow and Bois was named a Notable Children’s book by the American Library Association. Zolotow and Bois challenged the stereotype for the typical boy by creating a story about a young boy named William who wants a doll to play with, feed, and put to bed. His brother and neighbor tease him and call him names such as “creep” and “sissy” because he wants a doll (11). William’s father buys him a basketball and train set in order to get his mind off the doll but William still wants a doll and his grandmother buys him one. William’s grandmother justifies the doll by telling his father that William is practicing to be a future father. Although the grandmother’s justification calms William’s father, the justification implies her assumption that William will eventually be a father himself. Throughout the book there is no mention of William’s mother, and surprisingly the illustrations of the grandmother do not show her face. Her back faces the reader in all of the pictures. With regards to class, one may assume that William’s family is middle class because they own a house and William’s father buys him many toys including a train set. Characters of color are not present in this book.

Similar to Little Mommy, this book was written at the apex of the Women’s Movement and also the Gay Liberation Movement. The Women’s Movement ignited analysis of picture books for gender bias. Zolotow and Bois were likely influenced by the movement challenging traditional gender roles and thus created a story about a boy with non-traditional desires for a doll. A homophobic reader, especially a parent, would likely react very negatively to the portrayal of an effeminate male character. The Gay Liberation Movement helped push for acceptance of nontraditional lifestyles in the social sphere and in the legal sphere. Had this book been published before these two movements, it is likely that the book would have been banned based on traditional homophobic reactions.

A Chair for My Mother, written in 1982 by Williams, a Caldecott honor book, is a story about a young girl, her mother, and grandmother living together and saving up for a chair after everything in their apartment catches on fire. This book was examined by Dougherty, Holden, and Engel in 1987. In the 1987 study, the scholars focused on the clothes that the characters wore and the gender of the characters. The scholars indicated the children
depicted in the illustrations wore pants and t-shirts; thus the gender of the children was not clear and was classified as “neuter” (396). However, in my examination of the book, I discovered that some illustrations depicted children wearing skirts; thus I can assume that they are probably female. Dougherty, Holden, and Engel did not analyze the family structure in the book or the representation of race. I found that there is no indication of a father, husband, or grandfather. The story revolves around a girl, her mother, and her grandmother trying to make ends meet. The girl’s mother works as a waitress in a diner and the reader does not know if the grandmother works; because there is no mention of another income, the family most likely lives in a poor neighborhood. With regards to representation of race, several illustrations in the book contained characters of color. In the illustration depicting the diner where the mother works, one of the other employees in the diner is an African-American woman.

*A Chair for My Mother* was likely influenced by the Women’s Movement and the Civil Rights Movement. The omission of a male character contributing to the family’s income indicates a feminist representation of a hard working single mother. The presence of characters of color in the illustrations indicates the influence of the Civil Rights Movement. The main characters, the girl, her mother and her grandmother, are not depicted as Anglo characters; they are characters of some other racial/ethnic background. The initial impact of the Civil Rights Movements resulted in some publishers rereleasing books with the addition of a few background characters of color indicating the publishers’ low comfort level with characters of color as well as their desire to conform to the societal movements. The publishers of this book do not seem to be uncomfortable with portraying multiracial characters in their books.

In 2000, Hann and Nijland published *King & King*, a story in which traditional roles are challenged. The old queen tires of ruling the land and wishes to retire. She decides that her son must marry and invites princesses to come to her palace so that her son may choose a bride. The son does not like any of the princesses and states at one point that he has never “cared much for princesses,” hinting that he would be more interested in a prince (page 9 of 29). The last princess he sees arrives with her brother and, in a twist from traditional stories about princes searching out mates, the queen’s son decides to marry the brother. The reader knows that the queen was married two times but the reader does not know what happened to
the second husband; there is no mention of her son’s father. The book portrays characters of various ethnic backgrounds: the princesses come from many different countries such as Austria and India.

Overall, Hann and Nijland created a progressive multicultural story in which traditional values of the Anglo nuclear family are challenged. Although the queen forces her son to get married and invited only female royalty for him to choose from, she does not display any negative feelings towards the male partner her son chooses. The omission of the queen’s husband indicates the authors’ nontraditional values; although the reader is aware that the queen has been married two times, the authors do not indicate if the queen is still married. The omission of the queen’s marital status allows the authors to portray a strong female character. The queen states that she wants her son to get married because she is tired of the responsibilities of running the kingdom indicating that she alone runs the country.

_The Hello, Goodbye Window_ by Juster and Raschka, a 2006 Caldecott winner, is a story about a kitchen window. The main character is a young girl who enjoys being near the window, looking outside through it, and looking inside through it. The kitchen window is located at Nanna and Poppy’s house; they are most likely her grandparents. Throughout the book, Juster and Raschka describe the enjoyable things the young girl likes to do with the window, such as surprising Nanna and Poppy. At the end of the day, her parents pick her up and take her home. The young girl states that she hopes one day to have her own house and her own window that she can play with. She goes on to state that she may be a Nanna by that time, that she does not know who the Poppy will be but she hopes that he will be able to play the harmonica like her Poppy. By looking forward to her future Poppy, her future husband, the authors reinforce the heteronormative stereotype. The illustrations in the book consisted of mixed color in the style of a small child’s drawing, thus the race and/or ethnicity of the characters is difficult to determine. The only clue to the class status of the young girl’s family is the illustration of Nanna and Poppy’s three-story house which indicates that they are well-to-do.

Although Juster and Raschka depict some heteronormative concepts such as the little girl looking forward to having a husband similar to her grandfather, some of the concepts in _The Hello, Goodbye Window_ are very positive from a feminist point of view. For example, both parents of the little girl work indicating that the girl’s mother does not stay home like a
traditional housewife. And when the girl spends time with her Nanna and Poppy, both
grandparents play with her and take care of her. Juster and Raschka did not portray Nanna
doing more traditionally feminine things such as cooking for the family and they did not
portray Poppy doing mostly masculine things such as work outside the home. In fact, Poppy
helped with making breakfast for the little girl.

_Fancy Nancy and the Posh Puppy_, by O’Connor, a _New York Times_ Bestseller in
2008, is a story of a young girl named Nancy, who wants to get a puppy. Her family structure
is traditional: she has a mother and a father. Nancy’s parents stick to traditional femininity
and masculinity; this becomes obvious in one illustration that depicts the mother and father
looking through books about dogs. The mother shows Nancy a picture of “gentle dogs” while
the father shows Nancy a picture of “guard dogs” (page 8 out of 29). The authors did not
indicate the occupations of the girl’s parents. Nancy wears only dresses and dresses up by
wearing very bright colors, jewelry, and high-heeled shoes. She has a sibling who follows her
around and plays with her. Interestingly, the illustrator, Robin Preiss Glasser, depicted
Nancy’s sister in an androgynous manner. The sister does not wear dresses, she does not
have long hair, and she does not have any typical feminine characteristics that provide clues
that she is feminine. The text informs the reader that Nancy has a sister, but if the text did not
do so, one would not be able to determine whether Nancy has a sister or a brother. In terms
of race/ethnicity, there is an illustration a young girl with slightly darker skin that may
possibly represent an African-American character. In terms of class, the family seems to be
upper middle class as, for example, one of the illustrations depicts Nancy in a ballet class
indicating that her family can afford the classes.

O’Connor depicts a traditional Anglo upper middle class family that at the end of the
book buys their daughter a puppy. Clues as to the class status of the family lie in the
illustrations of the book. Nancy wears various “fancy” outfits with many hair and jewelry
accessories while the illustrations of other children are simpler. The illustrations also depict
Nancy’s large bedroom and the numerous toys in her room. And on an interesting note, one
of the illustrations depicts Nancy holding a book about small dogs called _Le Chic Chien_.
There are a few sticky notes visibly hanging out of the book and one page seems to be falling
out. The words written on the falling out page are “Toy Group” (page 8 of 29). In current
Hollywood fashion, many celebrities buy very small dogs that are referred to as _toys_ because
of their extremely miniature size. It is unfortunate that O’Connor chose to depict Nancy as a girl that tries her best to dress “fancy” and to have fancy celebrity-like items such as a miniature dog. The illustrations of Nancy present her as very girly; all of the pictures portray Nancy wearing pink and purple dresses and very feminine shoes; additionally, her bedroom contains mostly pink and purple items. In terms of representations of race, all of the characters in the book are Anglo except for one girl. The girl has somewhat darker skin tone than any of the other characters and has very curly hair. If the illustration is meant to depict an African-American character, then the illustrators fell into the trap of portraying a relatively light skinned character that without careful observation does not jump out as a character of color.

The six books I examined range from 1972 to 2007. Although most of the books have positive messages, the books are not bias-free. Most books still portray traditional Anglo nuclear families. In Fancy Nancy and the Posh Puppy, O’Connor failed to represent characters of color. I italicize the word “color” to emphasize the light skin tone utilized to depict an African-American character; O’Connor’s illustration reinforces the stereotype of assimilation as many people around the world (and also in the United States) bleach their skin in order have more of an Anglo appearance (Fuller; Vedantam). And in the United States, specifically, most advertisements contain pictures of very light skinned people of color (Stanford).

23 “Concern as Celebrities Bring Small Dogs Into Vogue”
CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

Social movements such as the Women’s, Civil Rights, and Gay Liberation Movements have influenced children’s books by allowing authors/illustrators and forcing publishers to depict employed women, characters of color, and gay/lesbian characters. Although the social movements opened a door for inclusion, authors and illustrators depicted women and people of color in biased ways. And very few authors delved into depicting gay/lesbian characters. Furthermore, few researchers analyzed picture books from a multidimensional angle.

In their discussions and conclusions, some scholars briefly mentioned representations of other themes but they did not thoroughly analyze them; they utilized an additive approach. Gooden and Gooden are a prime example; they analyzed representations of gender and mentioned in their conclusion other studies analyzing race and ethnicity. By mentioning other studies analyzing race/ethnicity, one can assume that the researchers are aware that race/ethnicity should also be analyzed, but they did not devote a section of their article to analyzing representations of race/ethnicity in the books they examined. Some scholars did conduct their investigations through an intersectional framework. Albers, for example, discussed representations of race and gender throughout her analysis and her analysis was therefore intersectional; she utilized a multiplicative approach in that she simultaneously analyzed two themes with equal weight. However, Albers views androgyny as problematic; she does not seem to grasp how one’s gender and physical appearance can simultaneously burden one’s experience.

Scholars analyzing race/ethnicity in children’s books focused overwhelmingly on representations of Black characters and did not analyze multiethnic representations (or lack thereof). A small number of scholars analyzed representations of Asian Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans; Native American characters were the least explored. This may be due to a dearth of picture books depicting Native American characters, but there are no studies evaluating the frequency of Native Americans in picture books. The few studies
analyzing Native Americans focus on the accuracy of the representation. With regards to analyzing other themes besides race/ethnicity, scholars analyzing the representation of Hispanic characters were most likely to also discuss representations of gender bias. Prida et al. exemplifies the merger of analyzing race/ethnicity and gender. This article was interesting to read because many of my Hispanic female friends complain about their controlling and demanding fathers and brothers. This makes one wonder if the books Prida et al. analyzed were intended to teach young girls their place or if the intention was simply to reflect cultural values. With regards to sexuality, none of the scholars analyzing representations of gay and/or lesbian characters examined other themes such as gender and race/ethnicity. Of the scholars analyzing gender bias, some also briefly mentioned the depiction of race/ethnicity.

The Women’s, Civil Rights, and Gay Liberation Movements created a stir in the academic world. Before the movements, few researchers’ analyzed picture books for themes other than children’s preference in books, impact of school readers, and children’s reading abilities. The social movements allowed people to challenge their oppression in various ways; researchers began analyzing race/ethnicity, gender, and more recently sexuality in picture books. But researchers still need to be reminded of the importance of multidimensional analyses. The dearth of intersectional research indicates what researchers deem most important and most influential.

In her 1989 article, Crenshaw described how the “single-axis framework” shackled researchers’ ability to examine the interaction between various variables such as race and gender. By examining only one variable, researchers are shackled to the wall and they are facing the wall. They cannot analyze the impact of the other walls and thus their analysis is monist. In her book, *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory*, Frye presented the metaphor of a bird cage to emphasize the benefits of intersectionality. If researchers microscopically analyze one wire of the cage, they will not understand why the bird cannot simply fly around the wire. A multidimensional framework allows researchers to view the entire cage macroscopically instead of only one bar at a magnified range. Ultimately, researchers will see that the “bird is surrounded by a network of systematically related barriers” (Frye 5). Researchers examining only one theme in picture books are not able to see the other related variables. In her argument for more multidimensional analyses, Crenshaw emphasized the exclusion of Black women from feminism and my research revealed that the
majority of articles focusing on the representation of Black characters did not analyze the representation of gender or sexuality in the picture books. As long as researchers work from a monist angle, they will not be able to challenge the disease of oppression; instead they pick at some of the symptoms of oppression. Analyzing the disease of oppression from a multiplicative approach—examining the impact of various variables simultaneously—will allow scholars and readers to view and define the disease and to begin the process of attacking it. Although the additive approach of intersectional analysis is an improvement from the monist approach, the additive angle still focuses mainly on one problem, and while other issues are mentioned, they are not fully explored.

Concerning the types of books analyzed, most scholars analyzed noteworthy books such as Caldecott winners, Newbery winners, Little Golden Books, Caldecott honor books and Newbery honor books. A small number of scholars analyzed random books from public and university libraries. Scholars analyzed noteworthy books with the assumption that many children read these books as the books are frequently in the news and teachers as well as parents recommend noteworthy books to children. Because many scholars focused on award-winning books, they did necessarily encounter some of the more progressive picture books. *Free to Be You and Me* by Marlo Thomas is an excellent example of a book not examined by researchers. Thomas’ book did not win any awards but it is worthy of mention because the book was printed in 1974 and it openly challenged gender stereotypes in terms of feminine and masculine roles, societal pressure for women to get married, and additionally the books depicted characters of various ethnic backgrounds. However, this book was not examined by any of the scholars and nor was it mentioned in any discussions or conclusions. If future scholars examine what books children actually read, analyses of those books may be more fruitful than analyses of books that are assumed to be read by many children. Furthermore, scholars should focus on books less well-known so that people reading the scholars’ analyses will be introduced to less well-known progressive books. Additionally, it may be fruitful to examine what influences children to read the books they choose to read whether it be parents, teachers, friends, the media or other sources of influence.

In conducting this meta-analysis, it was interesting to me to note scholars’ different points of emphasis depending on the theme. Scholars examining gender bias focused largely on quantity (number of female versus male characters) and quality (what roles female and
male characters play). Scholars examining racial bias focused almost entirely on quantity (number of characters of color in books). And scholars examining sexuality focused mostly on quality (whether or not gay/lesbian characters were portrayed positively). In future research, it would be interesting to investigate possible reasons why scholars choose to focus on quantity, quality, or both. More recent articles tend to focus less on quantity and more on how female characters are represented. However, progression of time does not necessarily indicate more intersectional approaches. In beginning this project, I assumed that recent studies would be intersectional considering the pollinating growth of Women’s Studies, Africana Studies, and other ethnic studies programs across the United States.

In the process of identifying scholarly work analyzing picture books, I experienced great difficulty in locating articles examining representations of alternative families in picture books. The easiest theme to research was gender; the amount of research studies on gender representations is plentiful. In locating articles examining representations of race, I had a difficult time finding studies focusing on non-Black characters of color. A few articles focused on representation of Asian and Hispanic characters and a small handful of articles examined representation of Native American characters. Generally speaking, there is a dearth of scholarly focus on representation of non-Black communities in picture books. Considering that the Hispanic population is so large in the United States, I was surprised to find so few studies of Hispanic representation. Studies from the 1970s seem to be more aware of various communities of color based on the number of scholars analyzing their representation in picture books.

With regards to alternative families, I was shocked to find so few studies examining representation of the LGBT community in picture books; many scholars focused instead on young adult novels. This may be because sexuality in general is controversial in its relationship to children, and therefore alternative sexuality is even more so controversial. The small number of picture books representing the LGBT community speaks to the controversy surrounding children and sexuality. To locate books with LGBT characters, I relied on the World Wide Web and was surprised to find that all recommended books contained lesbian and/or gay characters. I did not find one book with bisexual or transgender characters even though the recommending websites claimed these books had LGBT characters.
With regards to future research, it would be interesting to compare analyses of picture books in scholarly journals and in books. My analysis focused on academic research published in scholarly journals. It is possible that books offer space and opportunity to focus on multiple issues. Space availability does not excuse researchers from examining picture books from a single-axis framework but the possibility should be investigated. Additionally, I did not encounter a single study focusing on representations of class in picture books. In my analysis, I noted whether scholars mentioned class, and I made sure to evaluate class status in the books I analyzed. But the majority of scholars did not mention this variable. In fact, the majority of researchers did not describe potential variables other than the main issue they were focusing on. Future research analyzing picture books should focus on class as well as other variables. Considering that most of the researchers analyzed medal-winning books, it would be interesting to investigate how the popular medal-winning books represent (or omit) class status.
WORKS CITED


