

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Qualitative and quantitative analysis of the top ten best-selling children's picture books of 2006 reveals that these books contain elements of systematic privilege and oppression. Dominant group members are numerically overrepresented in the sample. Major emergent themes are the normalization of racism and white privilege, the stereotypical portrayal of the few female characters, and male characters' reckless disregard for others. These results are discussed in the context of educating adults to be aware of bias in the evaluation and selection of children's literature.

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A Thematic Feminist Analysis of Best-Selling Children's Picture Books

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Michelle Marie

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APPROVED:

Major Professor, representing Women Studies

Director of Interdisciplinary Studies Program

Dean of the Graduate School

I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

Michelle Marie, Author

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A Thematic Feminist Analysis of Best-Selling Children's Picture Books

1. Introduction

In the two years between conception of this research topic and writing my thesis, “What’s your thesis topic?” was a common question asked of me. My answer was something along the lines of, “I’m doing a thematic analysis of the top ten best selling children’s picture books⁰ from 2006 from a feminist perspective. Most studies of children’s literature focus on award-winning books and mainly compare frequencies of female and male characters. It will be interesting to see what themes of race, class, and gender emerge from my sample.” To outsiders, those uninitiated into social justice academia, my oft-repeated statement of thesis usually elicited nothing more than benign head-nodding and blank expression. While insiders, fellow women studies/feminist/social justice advocate types, also didn’t bat an eye, it was because they immediately “got” the idea that picture books just might be somewhat problematic.

The problem, though, is that as much fun as preaching to the proverbial choir is, it’s not the choir that has the most to gain from attention to the message, it’s adult “outsiders” who have the most to gain from a discussion of inequality in picture books. Therefore, the results of my analysis are intended to be applicable to writing a mass-market guide to children’s literature. This eventual guide to evaluating and selecting non-problematic books for children would also include suggestions of how to teach children to be critical evaluators of books themselves. Such a book will begin to answer Hade’s (1997a) call for adults to “teach children how to read, so that ... children will not be at the mercy of what they read. Perhaps if children can read the

ideology in their books, they will be able to read it in other areas of their lives” (121).

Using feminist theory as a primary interpretive paradigm, my analysis will identify emergent themes within a sample of picture books and position them within the broader framework of a society characterized by systematic inequality. Systems of privilege and oppression, namely racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, ableism, ageism, and looksism, provide unearned advantages to some and at the same time levy unfair disadvantages on others. I begin with the assumptions that these systems exist in society, that children’s literature reflects these systems, that children learn from books to exist within and to perpetuate these systems, and that this is a harmful situation which calls for action.

In each system, a dominant group is constructed as the norm from which others differ; members of dominant groups hold power and receive privilege simply because they are so identified. Biological sex (femaleness or maleness) is imbued with socially constructed meanings (gender). Sexism privileges men over women and masculinity over femininity. Burton Nelson (2007) points out that

[a]s every first-grader knows, there are physical differences between women and men, but these differences would be largely irrelevant except in matters of sex, reproduction, urination, and toupee purchases if it weren’t for our culture’s insistence on categorizing people first and foremost as “male” or “female.” (p. 148)

Lorber (2007) “contend[s] therefore that the continuing purpose of gender as a modern social institution is to construct women as a group to be the subordinates of men as a group” (p. 143). Racism privileges whites while oppressing people of color. McIntosh (2007) calls white privilege “an invisible package of unearned assets that [she] can count on cashing in each day,” and lists many ways in which whites embody social

dominance (p. 91). As a result, people of color experience oppression in many forms (Yamato, 2007). Ageism privileges adults over the elderly; Copper (2007) focuses on the ways in which women are made to compete with each other based on youthful appearance and the negative association of aging with death. Looksism privileges more attractive individuals over the less attractive. Brownmiller (1984) dissects female beauty norms and reveals that they are products and tools of patriarchy. Classism provides the middle class with the comforting, if mythical, sense of normality based on meritocracy, while denying the basic needs and rights of working-class and poor individuals (Langston, 2007). Wendell (2007) describes disability as a social construction “ranging from social conditions that straightforwardly create illnesses, injuries, and poor physical functioning, to subtle cultural factors that determine standards of normality and exclude those who do not meet them from full participation in societies” (p. 110). The routine configuration of the built environment in such a way that only people who are young, agile, slender, strong, ambulatory, sighted, and hearing can move freely through it creates categories of disability (Wendell, 2007). Heterosexism, the assumption that heterosexuality is the norm, privileges and provides civil rights to those who identify as heterosexual while oppressing and denying civil rights to lesbians and gay men (Shaw & Lee, 2007).

I approach my research from the same position of privilege from which I approach my daily life. I receive the unearned benefits which are concomitant with being white, middle-class, educated, currently young, currently able-bodied, and heterosexual. Race, class, age, heterosexual, ability, and looks privilege all serve as shields which protect me (and other members of dominant groups) from becoming

aware of the realities of oppression.⁰ Along with my experience as the mother of an equally privileged daughter, this elite position directs my interests toward gender, as sexism is the primary arena in which I am personally aware of systematic oppression. Throughout this project, I strive to remain conscious of my privileged position and to limit my unintentional exclusion of other perspectives. Although I apply the feminist principle of “the patterned voices of women” (Warren, 1990, p. 140), my privileged position within the class of women acts as a barrier to a genuine analysis of oppressive systems which do not act against me, requiring me to maintain an especially vigilant stance.

Systems of privilege and oppression are intersectional, convergent, and overlap in a myriad of ways. Although each category is often considered separately, no individual is gendered apart from her or his race, class, sexual identity, ability status, age, and appearance; no one’s sexual identity exists outside of her race, gender, class, ability status, age, and appearance; and so on. We are all located at the center of a Venn diagram; the circles of our gender, our race, our class, our ability status, our sexual identity, our age, and our level of physical attractiveness overlap. Each person occupies a position within each system, simultaneously and all the time; each person’s identity is determined by the combination of her or his group memberships, which may or may not change over time. Personally, I will grow old, but I will remain white; I am currently able-bodied, but I could experience a disabling accident on my way home this afternoon.

Systems interact with each other in complicated ways. Looksism intersects with ageism, heterosexism, and sexism; for women, youth, beauty, and appearing to

be heterosexual are nearly synonymous with each other and with personal worth, whereas for men, these factors are of much less importance (Shaw & Lee, 2007). Class privilege can serve as a partial buffer against racism, looks privilege can blind women to sexism, and ableism can render the most attractive, heterosexual, adult, white man vulnerable to attack.

Although a given group membership may be more salient than another in a given situation, we remain complex, whole people, irreducible to any one of our parts. Black feminist theorists in particular have pointed out that there are no situations in which they are either Black or women (Hill Collins, 2007). They are Black women, and although their identities as Black may be more relevant when applying for mortgages and their identities as women may be more relevant when walking a gauntlet of appraising male eyes, their experiences as individuals cannot be collapsed into categories considered individually. There may be instances in which my class privilege is most relevant (such as taking my child to the doctor), or in which my heterosexual privilege is highly apparent (when I freely refer to my partner's gender), but I take my heterosexual, age, race, ability, and looks privilege with me to the doctor's office, and my race, age, looks, ability, and class privilege with me into conversations.

My interest in applying a feminist analysis to the content of children's literature is grounded in my love of reading since childhood and sparked by my experience of mothering a daughter, experiences which both orient and potentially bias my approach. As a child, I spent every possible moment reading; I was one of those kids who brought a book to the table at mealtimes. My book choices were

influenced to a certain degree by my mother's desire that I read "classic" literature. She, although coming of age in the heyday of second wave feminist activity, maintained what I now identify as an anti-feminist ideology. I was not intentionally exposed to feminist children's literature, was unaware that I was absorbing problematic ideas, and was not exhorted to think critically about what I read. In the process of researching this thesis, it has become increasingly clear that my reading diet included a great deal of highly problematic literature. It is with growing feelings of betrayal that I encounter feminist analyses of books I read unquestioningly as a child and re-read favorite books with a feminist critical eye. I experience a measure of dissonance; my current critical self remembers my former uncritical self but doesn't quite recognize her.

This sense of disbelief becomes particularly salient as I share fondly remembered childhood favorites with my daughter. I continually realize that much of the content of my personal library is, to put it mildly, inconsistent with feminist ideals of equality; most characters are white and female characters tend to be either depicted in stereotypically feminine ways or they are nonexistent. Our reading sessions tend to be punctuated by my exclamations of incredulity, followed by my daughter's rather bored suggestion that we just "keep reading, mom."

The vital importance of critically evaluating literature was made strikingly clear the day my daughter expressed dismay because she does not have "long golden hair." We had been discussing possibly cutting her chin-length hair to reduce morning battles with tangles when she suddenly began to cry, saying that the other children would think she was ugly if she had short hair, and that another child in her class was

the prettiest because she had the longest hair. Since the phrase “long golden hair” is not a phrase seven-year-olds produce unprompted, my curiosity was piqued. Sure enough, it turned out that the central female figures in the stories told at her school all seem to have long, golden hair. My highly privileged daughter, who is intelligent, articulate, blond, blue-eyed, slender, white, well-liked, and self-assured, has internalized oppressive standards of female beauty to the point of tears, which is indicative of the damage done to all daughters.

My feminist perspective makes possible a certain level of potential bias. I am more apt to point out the negative aspects than to highlight the positive. Although of course I did not intentionally exclude relevant publications from consideration, my initial search process, in which my search terms included “racism,” “sexism,” and so on, resulted in a set of publications which documented systematic oppression in children’s literature. While I am aware that non-problematic books for children exist, and that even problematic literature can have redemptive qualities, I did not specifically look for publications which described non-problematic or redemptive aspects of children’s literature.

In section 1, I have summarized my feminist theoretical perspective, discussed my own social location, and addressed the question of potential research bias. In section 2, I define picture books as agents of ideology controlled by adults, demonstrate the importance of literature on children’s development, discuss guides to evaluating children’s literature, and present evidence that literature can be used to teach egalitarian values to children. In section 3, I summarize problematic themes in children’s literature which have been identified by previous researchers, and discuss

research revealing sexism, ageism, racism, ableism, and classism specifically in picture books. Section 4 describes my sample, my quantitative coding criteria, and my qualitative research method. Section 5 presents my findings; analysis of my sample reveals fundamental overrepresentation of dominant group members, three major themes emerged, and I discuss the potential queering of several books. In conclusion, Section 6 discusses the application of my findings to the writing of a mass-market guide to children's literature and summarizes a variety of guidelines to choosing non-problematic books for children.

2. Why Does it Matter?

According to Diane Roback, the children's book editor of Publishers Weekly, the publishing industry generally considers picture books to be suitable for children age eight and under. The category of picture books, however, is defined more by the format rather than by a specific age range (D. Roback, personal communication, August 30, 2007). Although Horning (1997) and Glazer (1991) mention that picture books are intended for young children, an age range for the picture book audience is not specified by these authors. Therefore, while recognizing that picture books are generally intended for children, I join Bradbury (2003) in defining picture books as books which "rely upon the illustrations to extend and complete the text" (p. 110).

Picture books have a profound influence on child development, because they serve young children as "a kind of guide to the way the world is" (Feminists on Children's Media, 1974, p. 10). However, the world picture books present to children is not a world in which most of us would wish our own children to live. Studies of children's literature indicate that female characters are overwhelmingly

underrepresented, females are depicted in stereotypical ways, people of color are portrayed inaccurately and stereotypically, and examples of classism, ageism, heterosexism, and looksism are prevalent (see, e.g., Crabb & Bielawski, 1994; Hamilton, Anderson, Broadus, & Young, 2006; Kennedy, 2001; Turner-Bowker, 1996; Tognoli, Pullen, & Lieber, 1994; Nilsen, 1971; Dorris, 1992; Reese, 2001; McGillis, 1997; Prida & Ribner, 1975).

Children's books are powerful agents of cultural ideology which, using language, teach children to accept systematic power imbalances in society. Ideology is "meaning in the service of power," and language is the means by which messages of domination are established and maintained (Knowles & Malmkjaer, 1996, p. 44). Popular culture, of which children's literature is just one manifestation, is ostensibly created in response to children's preferences and desires. However, childhood is also constructed, by children, from cultural materials and their meanings (Dyson, 2003). Children's literature is "a means of measuring society's basic assumptions. Prevailing ideas tend to be mirrored in children's books, and the books then reinforce the ideas" (MacCann, 1988, p. 197). When these ideas are saturated with social inequality, and because children "often use popular culture to learn about discourses of 'race,' ethnicity and gender" (Ali, 2003, p. 45), these cyclical social constructions are politically charged. Television advertising aimed at children contains strikingly stereotypical gender portrayals; children are introduced to gender norms at the same time that they are introduced to foods and toys (Johnson & Young, 2002).

Literature written for children is fraught with political meaning because it is "a product of the social order within which it arises and as a rule expresses, consciously

or unconsciously, its dominant social, political, ethical, and moral values” of race, sex, and class oppression (Bacon, 1988, p. 8). Children’s burgeoning understanding of society’s expectations and behavioral norms is built in part by books. Encounters with picture books contribute to their comprehension of the world (Langer, 1995). As children encounter and interpret text and images, the process of “envisionment building” allows them to “make sense of ourselves, of others, and of the world,” using their own experiences as a framework (Langer, 1995, p. 9). Children’s “envisionments” will therefore ultimately reflect the images of inequality they encounter. To the extent that children’s constructed worlds of meaning include stereotypes and examples which reinforce systematic inequality, those children are unlikely to discontinue those stereotypes and systems of inequality in the real world which they will eventually construct as adults.

Children do not control the selection of books they will look at, read, and/or have read to them (Giblin, 2000). Adults write, illustrate, publish, and sell books for children, and the books they produce reflect the values of the society in which they are created (Saltmarsh, 2007). When that society is a racist (and classist, and sexist, and homophobic, and ageist, and looksist, and ableist) one, children’s literature and children’s textbooks reflect, as well as perpetuate, those ideas (Banfield, 1985). As Greenfield (1985) so eloquently describes, racist authors are responsible for the oppressive content of their work. Such authors

manifest delusions of grandeur, delusions that the whiteness of their skin makes them somehow special. The necessity to keep these delusions well nourished, to fortify them against any invasion of reality, makes these people menaces to society ... They wield word-weapons, sometimes overtly, sometimes insidiously, yet they disclaim all responsibility for what they say,

being merely objective observers of the human scene, or secretaries transcribing the dialogue of characters over whom they have no control (p. 20).

Furthermore, adults decide which books to give, recommend, and/or read to children. In educational settings, for example, the choice of books to be presented to children contributes to inequality. As Short (2001) observes, children's books are "not ideologically neutral," but reflect a variety of significant biases, particularly racism and sexism (p. 187). Adults' selection of books is therefore "a political decision-making process in which the selection of some books results in the exclusion of others," which, Short contends, "needs to be disrupted" (p. 187). The conventional wisdom in teachers' choices of books to read aloud in classes is to choose books which will attract and hold boys' interest; teachers doing so participate, even if unwittingly, in perpetuating sexism (Huck, 2001). This practice prioritizes boys, ignores girls' interests, and takes girls' unquestioning acquiescence to their own secondary status for granted.

Aspects of corporately controlled culture, such as movies, video games, and playthings, play an increasingly important role in the construction of childhood (Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1997). For example, a feminist analysis construes corporate powerhouse Pleasant Company's American Girl universe as a site of cultural construction. Although they present a multicultural, welcoming facade, American Girl dolls, books and accessories are marinated in racism, classism, sexism, and colonialist interpretations of US history (Acosta-Alzuru & Roushanzamir, 2003). Taken as a whole, the material culture of early childhood is strictly delineated along gendered lines. Artifacts of material culture, such as clothing, hair styles, and color,

communicate to others the gender category to which a child belongs, providing a script for interacting and reacting to her or him. This process simultaneously creates gendered meanings and teaches the child how to behave in culturally appropriate ways (Calvert, 1998). Picture book illustrations provide important evidence of the presence and meanings of material culture (Crabb & Bielawski, 1994).

Children learn the significance of various group memberships in a variety of settings. This socialization process, through which identity is formed, is unconscious and most often goes unrecognized. We are born into a “web of stories pertaining to our gender ... a collective discourse comprising prohibitions, commands, roles, value judgements, exempla, fairy tales, and so on, which are absorbed through parents, school, the media, and other social institutions” (van Boheemen, 1987, p. 14). Children become aware of their own race category by the early grades, and preschool children demonstrate awareness of white dominance (Williams & Morland, 1976). At a young age, children of color learn coping mechanisms explicitly from parents, while white children learn from parents, media and each other to embody their race privilege, consider themselves to be superior as a result, and conflate the categories of “American” and “white” (Van Ausdale, 2001). Even our biology is shaped by social constructions of gender. Because the vast majority of children are identified at birth as belonging to a given sex and are immediately and relentlessly socialized into the corresponding gender role, “neuronal connections in the brain are reinforced through repeated experiences,” contributing to so-called biological sex differences (Lehr, 2001, p. 4).

Books are a powerful vehicle for transmission of cultural values, whether this

influence is intended or unintended, explicit or implicit. Bias in children's books gives boys a sense of entitlement to privilege and decreases girls' self-esteem, while both boys and girls learn a constricting idea of girls' and women's potentials and preferences (Tognoli, Pullen, & Lieber, 1994). Paterson and Loch (1990) cite Arbuthnot's (1964) finding that books are powerful socialization tools. They point out that eighteenth- and nineteenth-century children's books were explicitly intended to teach and reinforce society's expectations of children - a body of expectations that were fundamentally and thoroughly gendered. Children's literature of the 1800s was separated into distinct genres for girls and boys for this purpose (Wadsworth, 2006). In their analysis of New Zealand school readers, Jackson and Gee (2005) point out that school textbooks are particularly powerful socialization agents because nearly all children are exposed to them. Jassey (1998) points out the "power of school textbooks for imprinting social and cultural values," especially in Japanese culture, where school texts are overtly intended to serve that purpose (p. 88). Similarly, Girl Scout manuals both explicitly transmit social values and implicitly demonstrate changes in expectations of women over time (Auster, 1985).

Overwhelmingly, researchers conclude that children do internalize values through the books they read. Alexander (1975) considers books to be influential in Black children's development of self-esteem and self-awareness, as well as shaping white children's ideas about Blacks. Though she does not claim that derogatory content reflects deliberate racism on the part of the authors, Alexander emphasizes that "in white America they reflect the language of racism, and that is what children hear" (p. 11). Harris (1990) exposes the derogatory depictions of Black children in

texts they encounter in school, and claims that “they will not read or value schooling as much” as a result (p. 552). Kolbe and LaVoie claimed in 1981 that children are affected by books “without question,” yet they cautioned that more knowledge about the processes involved is needed (p. 374). Paterson and Loch (1990) cite research on children’s exhibition of gendered toy, clothing, and play preferences at early ages (Brown, 1956, & Hartley, 1959; as cited in Paterson & Loch, 1990) as evidence of the thoroughness of gender role socialization of children at an early age. Children’s literature is incorporated into children’s development of gender schemas; Gooden and Gooden (2001) emphasize this influence of literature on children. Trepanier-Street and Romatowski (1999) discuss psychological theories of child development of gender schemas. That gender expectations solidify very early in life is evidenced by studies showing that girls and boys prefer romantic or violent fairy tales according to stereotype (Collins-Standley & Gan, 1996), that children can distinguish between feminine and masculine speech (Swann, 1992), and that children respond to reverse-stereotyped fairy tales with scorn and disbelief (Evans, 1998).

On the individual level, the cumulative result of this under- and mis-representation of women, people of color, and members of other oppressed groups is that these same individuals do not find themselves, or representations of people like them, in the books they encounter. Non-dominant group members do not find themselves “mirrored” in the text, and the only reality visible through the “window” of the book is that of the dominant culture (Bishop, 1997). On the cultural level, the cumulative effect of this under- and mis-representation is the perpetuation of systematic inequality by continually teaching it to the next generation. We, with “we”

being somewhat loosely defined as anyone who has anything to do with the process by which children encounter picture books, have a clear responsibility to create change, and one method of doing so is to choose carefully the books we make available to children.

Many publications are devoted to the careful selection of literature for children on the basis of such factors as literary quality, age suitability, vocabulary subtlety and complexity, plot and character strength, illustrations, and general appeal (see, e.g., Dalgliesh, 1937, & Glazer, 1991). However, many such resources demonstrate a severe lack of awareness of inequality. Book reviews tend to focus on “literary quality and ignore the social context and impact of a book” (Hirshfelder, 2005). Guides to children’s literature tend to ignore gender and maintain an androcentric point of view (see, e.g., Ellis, 1973). The oldest resources are particularly androcentric, reflecting boys’ experiences and conflating “boy” with “child” (Dagliesh, 1937). In more recent guides, gender and race tend to be acknowledged, if briefly. Horning (1997) charges writers to use “inclusive language and illustrations. ... There is no excuse in this day and age for a children’s book of science experiments, for example, to show only white boys with test tubes” (pp. 27-28).

Many guides which approach usefulness in evaluating books from a feminist perspective stop short of explicit consideration of relevant issues. In a section summarizing forms of literary criticism, Russell (2005) suggests a few basic questions that lead to a feminist critique of literature, but his emphasis is exclusively on gender and does not address race, class, or other systems of oppression. Rossi’s (1982) guide is largely androcentric, and ignores gender as a category of interest, but recommends a

book depicting women employed in a variety of jobs, although all of them also “make cookies, ties shoelaces, and have laps to snuggle in” (p. 32), reinforcing the tired notion that if women are going to behave like men they had better remain women, too. Gillespie, Powell, Clements and Swearingen’s (1994) survey of race in 1922-1994 Newbery Medal winners summarizes appearances of nonwhite individuals by decade and discusses ways in which multicultural literature can be used in classrooms, but stops short of acknowledging the many examples of racism in the books, which are evident even in the brief summaries.

Several lists of recommended non-problematic books are available, and several do mention, if briefly, the criteria they used to select books. The Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory guide (1984) and Bracken and Wigutloff’s 1979 annotated bibliography include a few paragraphs on how they evaluated books, and Adell and Klein (1976) explain in an afterward that they excluded certain “classic” books from their recommendations because they focus mainly on male characters and portray female characters in stereotypical ways. In their recommended book list, *Feminists on Children’s Media* (1974) chose books with female main characters, imaginative books in which girls participate, books which depict a world in which “people of both sexes make jokes, act impatiently, are friendly, loving, wise” (p. 10), and books free of gender-based limitations. Rochman’s (1993) list of multicultural books emphasizes the importance of authenticity of voice, avoidance of stereotypes, and taking both children and subjects seriously. Cianciolo’s list of criteria she used for choosing informational books for children does include an injunction against books containing stereotypes, but she does not explain how to detect them (2000). Darby and Pryne

(2002) emphasize the need to present young readers with a variety of protagonists and themes, but fail to provide guidelines by which to identify problems in books.

Although including some information about their criteria, most guides do not explicitly outline methods for critically examining other books. Rudman (1995) is one of a few exceptions, although it is not specific to issues of systematic inequality and is not aimed at, nor easily accessible to, a non-academic audience. Similarly, Swann's (1992) discussion of gender in textbooks is a useful resource for the evaluation of classroom materials, and includes several useful checklists for monitoring gender in texts, but is unlikely to be discovered by a non-educator. In 1976, McGraw-Hill issued guidelines "for equal treatment of the sexes" to staff and authors, although their caveat, that "the language of literature cannot be prescribed," limits the guidelines to non-fiction, reference, and teaching materials (p. 45).

While these guides are extremely valuable tools, they are brief segments of works of much broader scope and/or aimed at a much narrower audience. It is not enough to issue a simple injunction against books which perpetuate stereotypes, because stereotypes can be subtle enough to elude detection by even an astute observer. Rather, picture books, such as the ones recommended by Vandergrift (1995), can be used by feminist teachers "to raise questions or illustrate points in relation to the development of authentic female voices and women's themes" (p. 61).

More helpful are guides which provide specific criteria for evaluating books. The Council on Interracial Books for Children (1977) provides guidelines for evaluating books about (using their term) Asian Americans; Reese (2001) discusses various stereotypes of Native American women in books, gives information on

positive traits to look for, and discusses several problematic and positive books.

Caldwell-Wood and Mitten's (1991) highly useful list of evaluative criteria for books on Native Americans is available online. Similarly, the Children's Literature Board (1977) provides guidelines for evaluating books about African Americans. Harris' (1997) edited volume contains chapters useful in evaluating books about Blacks, Puerto Ricans, Asian Pacific Americans, Mexican Americans, and Native Americans.

The good news is that children can be taught to notice and criticize stereotypes. A couple of years ago, my daughter's kindergarten teacher reported that, during story time, she had spontaneously piped up with the comment, "That's a gender stereotype!" She had begun to learn to read and interpret the signs of gender as they appear in stories (Hade, 1997a). Scholarly evidence also indicates that children acquire egalitarian values after exposure to nonsexist media (see, e.g., Flerx, Fidler, & Rogers, 1976). Leland, Harste, and Huber (2005) call for all children to receive training in critical literacy in order to "interrogate the systems of meaning that operate both consciously and unconsciously in texts, as well as in mainstream culture, to privilege some and marginalize others" (p. 259). Young children, especially girls, have been shown to display remarkably strong critical thinking skills when faced with stereotypical fairy tales (Westland, 1993). Wolf (2004) describes several occasions in which student teachers under her supervision successfully taught children as young as seven to be critical readers of fairy tales. Paterson and Loch (1990) discuss several studies that demonstrate the efficacy of presenting children with non-stereotypical literature in changing their attitudes. Each study they cite emphasizes the vast amount of sexist materials that are encountered by children on a daily basis, thus pointing out

the importance of exposing children to non-sexist materials consistently over significant periods of time.

Because children acquire ideas about gendered behavior from the books to which they are exposed, “it is important that in the early years they be exposed to non-stereotypic models” in order for them to acquire egalitarian attitudes (Trepanier-Street & Romatowski, 1999, p. 159). Teaching children to notice evidence of “the racialized, classed, and gendered nature of our culture” in their reading material equips them to “become readers not just of the word but also of the world” (Hade, 1997b, p. 241). Essentially, a lifetime of exposure to non-stereotyped, non-sexist materials is necessary in waging a campaign to counteract the stereotypes of an oppressive society. A guide which encourages adults to choose for children books which do not perpetuate systematic inequality, and which teaches adults how to discuss these issues with children, is a concrete, tangible contribution to that end.

3. Literature Review

This section explores problematic themes found in children’s literature in general, and then summarizes research specific to picture books. Although my focus is on picture books, in-depth analyses of individual children’s chapter books, which are longer and may, but do not necessarily, contain illustrations, are useful in assessing picture books. Various themes that are common to both children’s picture books and children’s chapter books have been identified. Stories for children often express the powerlessness of the small, weak, or vulnerable (Paul, 1990). Children and women have together been characterized as helpless and dependent, relegated to the periphery of activity, overlooked, and silenced (Paul, 1990). However, most research focuses on a

single category, such as gender or race, and fails to take into account other categories of privilege and oppression. Specifically, sexism, racism, and stereotyped ideas about women, men, and people of color are most often identified by critics; elements of ageism, looksism, heterosexism, classism, and ableism may be inferred from work focusing on something else but are rarely mentioned in their own right.

In 1971, the Feminists on Children's Media collective issued a scathing analysis of children's books as portraying female characters in traditionally feminine roles (as cited in Townsend, 1980). Stereotypes of women include passivity, with female characters waiting around for things to happen to them (Lehr, 2001), and inactivity, with female characters watching the action (Nilsen, 1971). Particularly in terror novels for teenagers, young women are commonly depicted as victims, often in a sexualized manner (McGillis, 1997).

Knowles and Malmkjaer's (1996) lexical analysis reveals that specific words are linked to each gender. Love, tenderness, and purity are associated with females, while strength, courage, and wisdom are associated with males. Books directed toward a young male audience expected and instructed them to be "manly," or hearty, brave, active, loyal, dutiful, aggressive agents.

The role of mothers in socializing their daughters, the reproduction of mothering, is explored in detail by Agee's feminist analysis of two Newbery Award Books (1993). She points out the consistency, over time, of "tomboy" female characters who grow up to accept and embrace the feminine role and offers several feminist philosophical explanations. While not applying a feminist approach, Maher (1996) describes a young female protagonist's personal journey from the tomboyish

ways of her childhood to her eventual identification with her mother's domestic femininity. In her analysis of two girls' adventure series' of the early 1900's, Singleton discovers that the initial non-traditional portrayal of the main characters in the first novels of the series soon gives way to a paradoxical ultra-feminine superhero model (2004).

Spirited, adventurous, gender non-conforming girl characters tend to become appropriately feminine as part of the process of growing up, and this result is presented in a positive light, even with a sense of relief (Paul, 1990; Wadsworth, 2006; Townsend, 1980; Agee, 1993; Maher, 1996). *Caddie Woodlawn*, for example, has been described by Feminists on Children's Media (1971) as a "cop-out" book because it ends by depicting Caddie, who in the beginning of the story is a strong, adventurous, freedom-loving girl, as abandoning her freedom to become a proper young lady.

Goodman (1993) examines gender in the *Babysitters Club* series of books. The books center around relationships, exemplifying the feminine ethic of care (Gilligan, 1982, as cited in Goodman, 1993). However, Goodman points out that the *Babysitter's Club* members illustrate her charge that Gilligan fails to critically examine the consequences to young women of such an ethic. Club members are consumed by guilt when they do not live up to their expectations of selflessness, and fail to recognize the need to take care of themselves. Further, Goodman fears that young women who identify with the *Babysitters* will remain in a world limited by gender. Young readers find no heroines in the Club, no fearless sleuths; the *Babysitters* are not rewarded for their compulsive caring and nurturance of others (Goodman, 1993).

Jassey (1998) notes that when male and female characters are depicted

performing gender nonconforming tasks, there are no members of the other gender in the story. For example, when a woman is the primary breadwinner, she is a widow; when men, such as grandfathers, perform caretaking, there are no adult females present.

In books for and about Puerto Ricans, both female and male characters are depicted in gender stereotyped ways. Girls are depicted as being nice, obedient, helpful to their mothers, wearing dresses, staying near home, and participating in gender-appropriate school and play activities such as hopscotch, jumping rope, sewing, gardening, and playing with dolls. When dolls are present, as they often are, the dolls have light skin and hair. Boys, on the other hand, are active, participate in a variety of activities away from home, are bossy (older brothers, fathers, and gang leaders control girls' actions), and are often delinquent (Prida & Ribner, 1975).

In children's readers, good girls give of their time and energy, and their altruism is presented as self-sacrificial; good boys may give of their time and energy as well, but when they do, they are serving society without incurring a personal cost. Similarly, girls have accidents in the process of performing household tasks or simply because they are silly girls, while boys' accidents are the result of rough or adventurous play. Both boys and girls make demeaning statements about girls; members of the group "girls" are subjects of ridicule (Women on Words and Images, 1972).

Multiple factors have been identified as evidence of racism in children's literature. At the most fundamental level is the intimation, subtle or otherwise, that white is normal and nonwhite is other, with concomitant positive and negative connotations. This process of othering can be implicit; for example, "swarthinness" is

commonly used to describe mysterious nonwhite male characters (McGillis, 1997).

Young readers, my adolescent self included, are unlikely to recognize such an apparently benign description as evidencing racism. Similarly, members of the dominant culture are unlikely to notice the racism inherent in the nearly-ubiquitous use of standard English in children's books (Bacon, 1988). In nineteenth century traditional British juvenile fiction, white "Englishness" is presented as a natural state, with "Englishness" defined by the same adjectives used to describe ideals of masculinity. Members of other nationalities or races are described in a variety of derogatory and/or condescending ways, as savages, natives, niggers, or negroes (Knowles & Malmkjaer, 1996). Additionally, I would point out the intersection of racism and sexism inherent in the conflation of Englishness - personhood - with masculinity.

The dominant culture creates and perpetuates mythical ideas of Native American nations that provide a false sense of familiarity to dominant culture members. The inaccurate and biased portrayal of the wide variety of Native people and cultures "has a consistency in children's picture books which the child cannot escape" (Lewis, 1988, p. 151). These stereotyped images of Native people "are laden with predetermined meaning" and are so routinely encountered that the validity of these meanings remain unquestioned. At the same time, these images are "abstracted from any sensible context" and deny the specific realities of Native cultures (Lewis, 1988, p. 137). Images of Native Americans living "in perfect harmony with their environment" express the dominant culture's construction of Native Americans (Hade, 1997a, p. 116).

Portrayals of Native Americans are rife with stereotypes and white supremacist

attitudes. Both negative, “whooping, silly, one-dimensional cartoons,” and positive, “veritable angels, pure of heart, mindlessly ecological,” stereotypes of Native Americans are inaccurate (Dorris, 1992, as cited in Wolf, 2004, p. 142). The generic “Indian” is a prevalent falsehood; rather than recognizing the diversity of indigenous North American nations, Native Americans are often depicted wearing inauthentic or non-specific clothing, described as savages or violent warriors, and/or accompanied by inaccurate characterizations of tribal traditions, customs, and beliefs (Stott, 1995; Byler, 1977; Lewis, 1988). The relative importance of women in Native American cultures is not accurately reflected; women tend to be depicted as peripheral figures doing drudge work and/or stereotyped as squaws or princesses (Reese, 2001). The depiction of whites as rescuing or teaching values to Native Americans, as well as comparisons of Native Americans to nonhuman animals, reinforces white supremacy (Byler, 1977; Lewis, 1988; Molin, 2005).

White supremacist ideology is apparent in many historical fiction and nonfiction books for children; antebellum and postbellum children’s books depict Blacks as inferior to whites (MacCann, 1998). Stereotypes of Blacks include watermelon eating, superstitious, exaggerated speech, and recurring appearances of the “Contented Slave, the Wretched Freeman, and the Comic Negro” (Banfield, 1985, p. 25). Juvenile fiction about the American Revolution also presents a racist and one-sided view of history. Blacks are severely denigrated in older novels, while even in more recent novels, which are less explicitly stereotyped, slavery is either avoided or dismissed. The contradiction of whites fighting for freedom while maintaining Blacks’ slave status is ignored, even though there were many contemporary critics of the

situation (Taxel, 1988). In the popular Elsie Dinsmore series books, racism is evidenced by ignoring the reality of slaves' lives; slaves are portrayed as happy, well cared for, and content employees. Exaggerated stereotypes of slave speech and explicit evidence of white ownership of slaves were attenuated somewhat in 1999 revisions of the books, but the books' attitude of white supremacy is merely masked by such changes. The revisions also serve to pass the books off as historical fiction, rather than identifying them as 19th century contemporary fiction (Sekeris, 2005).

Conflicts between oppressed and oppressors, such as Native American nations and colonizers, tend to be explained in a racist manner and outside historical context. History is related from the perspective of the dominant culture; while Native men are described as vicious warriors, colonizing men are referred to simply as men. Portraying Native groups as inherently and/or culturally violent allows hegemonic ideology to explain episodes of violence as Native Americans' expressions of unprovoked aggression rather than as a legitimate response to white invasion (Lewis, 1988). When whites win an armed conflict, they are hailed as victors, but when Native Americans win, it is characterized as a massacre (Rochman, 1993).

The role Rosa Parks' arrest played in the Montgomery bus boycott is often trivialized in textbooks. The hostile reality of segregation is downplayed, and Parks' refusal to cede her seat is inaccurately attributed to personal fatigue rather than correctly placed in the context of collective political action (Kohl, 1991). When children's books portray conflict resolution as the achievement of simple racial harmony, they blind "young readers to the economic and social conditions ... [and] cannot change the inequitable systemic structures and hierarchies that reproduce these

conditions in the material world” (Ching, 2005, p. 131).

Particularly egregious is the effective whitewashing of ancient Egyptians in children’s books on the subject. Most books in Lumpkin’s (1988) analysis fail to even mention Egypt’s location in Africa; both nonfiction and fiction works contain omissions and inaccuracies regarding the scientific sophistication of Egyptian culture. Illustrations portray Egyptians as tanned Greeks or Europeans, and children are left to infer for themselves that the reproductions of ancient Egyptian artwork do, in fact, depict Africans (Lumpkin, 1998). Picture book illustrations of Blacks tend in general to look like shaded-in drawings of whites (Hudson, 1997).

Hade (1997a) identifies as racist the appropriation of people of color as objects to allow the white-centered plot to move forward, as in the common scenario of a rational Black person whose function in the story is to set up an insane white character. Blacks are passively present in stories to complement active white characters’ development, which is the center of the story (Thompson & Woodard, 1985). The common semantical association of white with good and black with bad is found in children’s books, as well as the association of intelligence with relative skin lightness (Broderick, 1973; Wolf, 2004; Hurley, 2005). Books often depict Black assimilation into white culture at the expense of Black culture, Blacks explaining themselves or their culture for whites’ benefit, and stereotypes of Blacks singing and dancing (Children’s Literature Board, 1977). Children’s books often include the superficial integration of a single Black into an otherwise all-white situation, highlighting only extraordinary Blacks, depictions of whites solving Blacks’ problems, and Blacks receiving help and/or acceptance from whites (Children’s Literature Board, 1977).

Broderick (1973) points out that the “idea that the good intentions of nice white individuals could solve a black [person’s] fight with society’s restrictions is one of the most erroneous concepts found in children’s books” (p. 86).

Young male Puerto Rican characters are depicted as juvenile delinquents (Prida & Ribner, 1975). Mexican Americans tend to be stereotyped as simple and fun-loving, and are typically portrayed as migrants or immigrants, while most Mexican Americans are neither migrants nor immigrants (Barrera & Garza de Cortes, 1997, as cited in Wolf, 2004). Stereotypes of Chicano/a culture include resignation to poverty, helplessness and reliance on whites to provide solutions, exaggerated sexism in gender roles, and lack of Spanish language use.

Stereotypes of Asian Americans are that they all look alike, choose to segregate themselves in urban areas, as well as general misrepresentation of traditions, customs, beliefs, festivals, and clothing. Also, Asian Americans are the subjects of the idealized model minority myth; learning to speak English, working hard, and getting an education are depicted as pathways to successful adoption of middle-class white culture (Council on Interracial Books for Children, 1977).

White privilege appears in children’s literature in the forms of “white talk, colorblind theories of race, historicizing racism, and privileging White feelings over the material conditions of people of color” (Rogers & Christian, 2007, p. 30). White talk is spontaneous speech that at once denies the existence of racism while perpetuating it; white talk maintains the normality and supremacy of whiteness. Colorblindness, the refusal to acknowledge the social reality of racial categorization, perpetuates the myth that we are all the same, deflects attention from structural

inequality, and attempts to convince oppressed individuals that the injustice they experience is a personal problem. Colorblindness also functions to absolve whites from accepting personal responsibility for our race privilege. Setting a story which contains elements of racism in a historical context serves to indicate that racism is not a problem in modern society; white privilege allows whites to remain unaware of the lived reality of racism. Placing more importance on white characters' feelings and/or their experiences in response to racism than is placed on the effect of racist events on people of color exemplifies white privilege.

Classism in children's literature is evidenced in several subtle ways. Class privilege is inherent in the portrayal of middle-class cars, garments and accessories as normative (McGillis, 1997). Taxel (1988) notes that main characters of historical novels are overwhelmingly of the middle and upper social strata, which both falsely represents the socioeconomic reality and strengthens the myth that the US is a society free of class distinctions. Prida and Ribner (1975) point out that the reality of Puerto Rican women's lives is not reflected in books purporting to be about them; "authors' middle class values keep them from discussing the realities of ghetto life - the reality of drugs, the reality of prostitution, and all the other realities poor women are oppressed by every day" (p. 48).

Stereotypes about the working class are based on the assumption that middle class values are the ideal norm; pretensions of the lower class to higher status are assumed to add a note of humor, such as a young working-class boy wearing a collared shirt and tie in his daily life (Hade, 1997a). Beatrix Potter's "stories depict social status and power through clothing" (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2001, p. 96). Broderick (1973)

observes the equation of cleanliness with middle class acceptability and dirtiness with the unacceptable lower class. Doray (1989) adds the observation that washing to make oneself presentable to a member of a more powerful group is common in literature, and that “clean” is often a mitigating factor of poverty in order to establish that someone is acceptable, even though poor. Goodman (1988) surveyed 15 books intended to teach children about economics and financial management, and concluded that they convey classist, sexist, ableist, and ageist messages while they “indoctrinate our children with a strongly procapitalist view” (p. 57). The books inaccurately depict middle class families as the norm, report economic inequality as an unquestioned reality, and attribute poverty to poor financial management. Illustrations portray men in positions of power and women as subordinates, while women’s household work is devalued (Goodman, 1988). Classism extends to children’s material culture as well. Mitchell and Reid-Walsh (2002) point out the association of “promotional” toys with working-class culture; “quality” toys, which are the ones recommended by experts and selected by teachers and parents who can afford them, are those of the middle class.

Sexual identity in children’s literature reflects heterosexism as well as sexism; young women are depicted as victims of sexualized predation (McGillis, 1997), fairy tales are strictly heterosexual, single women are expected and encouraged to marry while single men are not (Wolf, 2004; *Women on Words and Images*, 1972), and the heroine’s goal is to be chosen by a man (Brownstein, 1982). Heterosexual marriage is presented as the ultimate and normative goal for females, particularly in traditional fairy tales, which depict the heroine as the beautiful object of the prince’s selection and depict marriage as something which takes place at the prince’s initiation (Kim, 1997).

Looksist ideas of appearance in children's literature are particularly intertwined with other systems of oppression. Concepts of beauty and virtue and whiteness are mutually associated, while ugliness and evil are associated with blackness. For female characters in children's books, blond or golden hair is depicted as both being the standard of beauty, as my own daughter certainly understands, and connoting brainlessness (Clancy, 1997). In descriptions of characters, Alexander (1974) points out that white characters' hair is described in laudatory terms, while Black characters' hair is described in derogatory terms. Girls tend to be depicted as being preoccupied with clothing, grooming, and appearance in school readers, while boys are not shown caring about appearance (Women on Words and Images, 1972). Girls' ultimate goals are to be beautiful and attract men, which they are able to do only as a function of their beauty (Lehr, 2001). Confluences of racism, sexism and looksism are particularly salient in Broderick's (1973) analysis. Darker Black men are paired with lighter Black women, intelligence is associated with relative lightness, derogatory adjectives are used to describe Black appearance, such as hair being "woolly," and Blacks attempt to look or become as white-looking as possible (Broderick, 1973).

Ageism is detectable in children's literature, largely by omission of older adults; Ansello's (1978) study of a large sample of picture books revealed that only 16% contained old characters. Of those, fewer than half were female and 3.4% and 1.2% were Black and Hispanic, respectively. Old people are depicted as boring (Ansello, 1978) and as mean, ugly, old stepmothers who resent daughters' burgeoning sexuality, a staple of traditional fairy tales (Wolf, 2004). Hurley and Chadwick (1998) note that, while aged male characters tend to be authentically portrayed, aged female

characters remain passive observers to the story's action or are depicted stereotypically (Ansello, 1978).

Although there is a small amount of research similarly investigating other systems of oppression in children's books,⁰ sexism in picture books has been thoroughly documented using both quantitative and qualitative methods in the 35 years since Weitzman and colleagues' landmark 1972 study. Overall, female characters are underrepresented in picture books to varying degrees. Many studies focus on recipients of various awards. The Caldecott Medal winners and Notable Children's Book List are selected by committees under the auspices of the Association for Library Service to Children. The Caldecott Medal is awarded to an outstanding picture book based on illustrations, and designates two Honor Books, or runners-up. The Notable Children's Book List, which automatically includes Caldecott honorees, includes many books which are designated as the best in children's literature. The Horn Book award is given to one book and two Honor Books (runners-up) by a three judge panel appointed by the Horn Book's editor.

Weitzman and colleagues' (1972) study of Caldecott Medal winners revealed an eleven to one ratio of males to females. By 1984, the gender gap in Caldecott winners and runners-up from 1979 to 1982 had narrowed to two to one (Collins, Ingoldsby, & Dellmann, 1984). In the 19 Caldecott Medal books from 1979 to 1997, however, Hurley and Chadwick (1998) found that male characters outnumber female characters by a three to one ratio. Kolbe and LaVoie (1981) repeated the Weitzman, et al. study on Caldecott Medal winners and runners-up from 1972 to 1979, and found that although there were relatively more depictions of female characters, those female

characters were typically portrayed in stereotypical ways. Davis and McDaniel (1999) found, in their replication of Czaplinski's 1972 study on Caldecott winners, that the status of women as portrayed in Caldecott winners from 1972-1997 was even more dismal than Czaplinski's findings of Caldecott winners from 1940-1971; the percentage of female characters depicted in illustrations was eight percent lower in the most recent set than in the earlier set. Hamilton et al. (2006) analyzed a sample of 200 top selling and Caldecott winning books, using a survey instrument that they developed following Weitzman and colleagues' methodology. They found that more recent books are no more gender equal than books from the 1980s and 1990s, with female characters significantly underrepresented as main characters and in titles and illustrations. Turner-Bowker (1996) found that, although there was no significant difference in the number of female and male central roles of her sample of Caldecott Medal books of the decade 1984-1994, male characters outnumbered female characters in titles and illustrations. Nilsen (1971) surveyed 80 Caldecott winners and runners-up, and found a variety of examples of sexism; four female titular characters compared to 14 males, 386 females in illustrations compared with 579 males, and six books with no female characters whatsoever, while no books had no male characters. Additionally, she notes that in 25 percent of her sample depicted female characters only in the background.

Sexist depictions of female characters in specific subsets of children's chapter books has been noted. Dickerson's (1977) study of deviant behaviors in children's books concluded that female characters were portrayed as deviant almost twice as often as male characters were so portrayed, even though most authors were female. Of books with chronically ill main characters, 80% of those main characters were female (Saad,

1999). As Crabb and Bielawski's (1994) study of Caldecott books revealed, artifacts depicted in illustrations are gender-marked; female characters were depicted using artifacts of reproductive labor, while male characters were depicted using artifacts related to productive labor.

Both male and female characters are consistently depicted in stereotypical ways (Hamilton et al., 2006). Gooden and Gooden (2001) reiterate the consistency of stereotypic gender portrayals in their study of a sample of Notable Books for Children. Though there were an equal number of female and male main characters in their sample, the roles portrayed by each sex tended to follow traditionally stereotypical patterns; characters performing cross-gender activities were almost exclusively female. They conclude that small decreases in stereotypes appear, but that "stereotyped images of females are still significant" in their sample (p. 96). Tognoli, Pullen, and Lieber (1994) found that male characters were more likely to be shown outdoors than female characters, that male characters were shown in a larger variety of occupations than female characters, and that both male and female occupations were largely gender stereotypical. Turner-Bowker's (1996) analysis of words used to describe female and male characters revealed that adjectives associated with members of each gender followed stereotypical gender norms.

Clark, Guilmain, Saucier, and Tavarez (2003) revisited Caldecott books of four decades, and concluded that the prevalence of gender role stereotypes varied greatly, possibly reflecting social change. Their results supported their hypothesis that the variations could be the result of what they termed "local variation," or an effect based on the values and opinions widely felt in society in each time period (p. 442). Books of

the 1930s drew heavily on “traditional American and Western stories” for inspiration, and although the highest proportion of books with a main female character was found in this decade, they also contained the most stereotypical depictions of both female and male characters (p. 442). The relatively fewer female characters in books of the 1940s, the storylines of which tend to “[turn] away from adult human society and its troubles” and revolve around “safe” topics of children, nature, and animals, are depicted with a less stereotypical range of characteristics (p. 444). Books of the 1950s portray the second-highest rate of female characters, as well as the second-highest degree of gender-stereotypical female depiction, which is consistent with the “‘separate spheres’ ethos of the decade” (p. 444). The books of the 1960s depict the fewest women, but those women are portrayed in the second least stereotypical manner, which the authors suggest may reflect the dramatic social change of that decade (Clark et al., 2003).

Researchers tend to maintain an attitude of guarded optimism that children’s books are becoming more gender equitable, except for a few who find no progress toward equality, such as Jackson and Gee (2005) and Hamilton et al. (2006). Although the gap between numbers of female and male characters is slowly shrinking, one significant caveat is that female characters have gained a much wider range of traits than male characters. Gooden and Gooden (2001) describe greater gender-role flexibility for female characters than for male characters; more females cross gender role lines than males. Kortenhaus and Demarest (1993) concluded that both girls and boys are occasionally shown in gender nonconforming ways in recent books and that the ratio of male to female characters is becoming more equal over time. Noting the disappearance by the late 1970s of research concerning sexism in children’s literature,

Paterson and Lach (1990) intended their study to remediate this lack. Their study of the 1967, 1977, and 1987 Horn Book award winners indicated a non-statistically-significant trend toward increases in the numbers of female main characters and adventurous girl characters. A few years later, Oskamp, Kaufman and Wolterbeek (1996) replicated the Weitzman et al. Caldecott books study with titles from 1986-1991, finding that the numbers of male and female human characters were significantly closer to being equal than in the earlier sample. This was not the case, however, for animal characters, which were almost all males. Oskamp et al. concluded, with guarded optimism, that although there is a trend toward gender equality in children's literature, "there is still a distance to go" toward presenting children with a wide array of high-quality egalitarian reading material (p. 38).

However, Kortenhaus and Demarest (1993) emphasize that, even though progress has been made, characters are predominantly depicted in gender stereotypical ways. Diekmann and Murnen (2004) conclude that even supposedly nonsexist literature contains gender inequity; though female characters in their sample displayed aspects of masculinity, male characters were not depicted as displaying corresponding aspects of femininity. The portrayal of fathers in recent children's books reflects this lack. Both Anderson and Hamilton (2005) and Wharton (2005) concluded that when fathers are portrayed in books published in 1995-2001 and 1989, respectively, they are likely to be portrayed as uninvolved in nurturing children. Anderson and Hamilton (2005) examined a relatively large and varied sample of books, compared with other studies. Their findings include a rate of mother nurturance of infants ten times that of father nurturance, twice as many instances of mothers than fathers nurturing older children,

and no parenting behaviors performed more frequently by fathers than mothers. They concluded that “fathers were significantly under-represented” as caregivers (p. 149). Flannery Quinn (2006) noted that fathers and mothers were present in nearly equal numbers in a sample of 200 Caldecott winners, but that fathers were less frequently depicted as showing physical affection to children.

It remains important to note that, in order to socialize children to share nurturing responsibility equally, egalitarian models must be presented to them. Multiple researchers point out that it is imperative to scrutinize the ways in which women and men are portrayed in children’s literature (Kolbe & LaVoie, 1981; Oskamp et al., 1996; Diekman & Murnen, 2004). Taking the stance that literature helps construct children’s concepts of femininity and masculinity, Wharton calls upon adults, including parents, educators, and the children’s book industry, to more responsibly present egalitarian models to children. Jackson and Gee (2005) emphasize that schoolbooks, in particular, should demonstrate equality to children.

A few researchers’ findings present a somewhat less bleak picture of gender equality. Kok and Findlay’s (2006) analysis revealed no statistically significant gender bias in their sample of 25 Australian award winning picture books. Association with emotional language was found by Tepper and Cassidy (1999) to be equally distributed between male and female characters - after accounting for the fact that twice as many male as female characters were present. In a unique instance of gender equality, Nilges and Spencer (2002) found that male and female characters were actually equally inactive in their analysis of physical activity in Caldecott books, and call for children’s books to encourage children of both sexes to exercise.

Findings which indicate greater gender equality tend to be based on simple counts of female and male characters, as in Gooden and Gooden's counts of main character gender (2001), while studies taking into account the gender of characters in illustrations, such as Davis and McDaniel's (1999), tend to find a lack of equality. Oskamp et al. point out that simply counting characters and their behaviors does not provide a comprehensive analysis of the "underlying themes or morals" of stories (p. 38). They give several examples of books in their sample which contain either stereotyped and non-stereotyped plot lines. Clearly, research methods which rely upon frequency do not reveal the full picture.

While praising feminist efforts to bring attention to sexism in children's books, Segel (1982) criticized the 1972 Weitzman et al. study and a 1971 article by Nilson for potentially distorting the underrepresentation of female characters in the books they studied. Segel chides Weitzman et al. for claiming that Mrs. Noah is "completely omitted" from a book in their study, though she is depicted in one illustration (Weitzman, et al., as cited in Segel, 1982, p. 31). Segel (1982) also cites a "disturbing tendency" of both Nilson (1971) and Weitzman et al. (1972) to "assume that any illustrated figure of unspecified gender is male" (p. 31).

Elderly characters are passive, described in pejorative terms, and are stripped of their familial and occupational roles in the sample of Caldecott winners and non-winners surveyed by Hurst (1981). In that sample, elderly characters almost never interact with children, never make decisions, and are mostly male (Hurst, 1981). Hurley and Chadwick (1998) found that although there is an increase in active young women characters, adult and aged women characters remain passive in their sample of

Caldecott winners. Dellmann-Jenkins and Yang (1997) examined the eleven Caldecott winners and runners up between 1972 and 1995, and discovered that the most recent books portrayed older adults more positively than the oldest books. Overall, though, older male characters were “more frequently depicted as ‘active’ than older women, while older women were portrayed more often than older men as being ‘frightened’” (p. 99).

Pescosolido, Grauerholz, and Milkie (1997) found that the small percentages of Black characters in their sample of Caldecott, Children’s Catalog, and Little Golden books rise and fall inversely to rates of racial conflict. Of all books depicting human characters, 18.5% depicted at least one Black character, although often in the background, and 2.2% depicted only Black characters (Pescosolido et al., 1997). Although ten of the 19 books in Hurley and Chadwick’s (1998) sample depicted nonwhite cultures, only a few books depict mingling of members of multiple cultures. Edmond’s (1986) analysis of race in picture books concludes that “the portrayal of race has been neither offensive nor satisfactory” (p. 35). Collective pictures of nonwhites are simplified, disrespectful, and flat compared to depictions of whites, who are overwhelmingly the majority of human characters (Hall, 2004).

Brittain (2004) synthesizes several researchers’ findings into a list of six common aspects of picture books written about or directed toward individuals with disabilities. Such books tend to dehumanize the “character with an impairment,” portray the character as extraordinary, place the character in secondary position to a hearing character, be inaccurate about the facts of the impairment, portray the character as a social outsider, and fail to provide happy endings (Brittain, 2004). Solis (2004)

emphasizes the power of children's books to create and solidify the dichotomous categories of ability and disability, and designate them as normal and abnormal states of being. None of the books scrutinized by Worotynec (2004) depict children with disabilities in proactive leadership roles. While two of these books convey more positive messages about children with disabilities, most stories are told from the perspective of able-bodied children who learn to include their disabled peers, rather than fully integrating children with disabilities as a matter of course.

The few studies which include socioeconomic class as a variable of analysis indicate that the reality portrayed in children's books is a middle class one. Most stories in a selection of popular reading textbooks depicted a white, middle class reality (Grant & Grant, 1981). Brugeilles, Cromer, and Cromer's (2002) study of French picture books reveals that when characters are depicted in a social setting, it is most often that of the middle class.

In sum, this section has presented evidence that children's books, including textbooks, chapter books, and picture books, reflect the various systematic inequalities in society and how the systems intersect. Stereotypical depictions of nonwhites, women, and the elderly are common, and members of target groups are depicted disproportionately infrequently. White dominance is reinforced, as is the myth that most people are middle class.

4. Methods

The primary project of this thesis, a qualitative and quantitative feminist analysis of a sample of picture books which can subsequently be applied to writing a mass-market adults' guide to picture books, is an exercise in literary criticism. Broadly

defined, literary criticism is the interpretation of literature “in an attempt to construct meaning” (Wolf, 2004, p. 21). Wolf (2004) defines *genetic criticism* as the interpreting a work as a reflection of the author’s experiences, *formal criticism* as focusing on the text to the exclusion of the author’s intent and the reader’s interpretation, *text-to-text criticism* as fitting one text into a larger body of literature, and *transactional criticism* as emphasizing that a reader’s life experience serves as a guide to the text. The meaningful interpretations I create, however, are indifferent to these forms of criticism. As a feminist, my approach is a form of *sociocultural criticism*, which asks whose experiences, norms, and points of view are present and valued and whose are not (Wolf, 2004).

Words and images certainly transmit ideas, but picture books construct and convey additional complexities of meaning via the complex and dynamic interactions between text and illustrations. Nikolajeva and Scott (2001) describe a variety of relationships between text and illustrations in picture books; pictures are iconic signs which function to “describe or represent,” while words are conventional signs the function of which “is primarily to narrate” (p. 1). Picture and text interact with each other in a variety of ways, *symmetrically*, in which they tell essentially the same story, *enhancing*, in which pictures add meaning that is not present in the text, *complementary*, in which a great deal of enhancement takes place, *counterpointing*, in which words and pictures work together to convey more meaning than either can convey alone, and *contradictory*, in which the ambiguity of apparently contradictory text and illustrations must be resolved by the reader (Nikolajeva and Scott, 2001).

According to Rosenblatt’s (1978) reader response theory, any text is merely

words on paper until a reader creates it as a literary work. Along with Flannery Quinn (2006), I contend that even though each reader may interact differently with the text, the text does exist, on its own, as an artifact of popular culture. “[A] content analysis of the images provided (in both the pictures and the text) can provide a basis for exploring” picture books as conveyors of cultural ideas and as one of many socialization agents (Flannery Quinn 2006, p. 75). Simply stated, each book does convey cultural meanings that do not depend on the reader’s interpretation, and my intent is to expose sexism, racism, classism, looksism, heterosexism, ableism, and ageism within them. Simultaneously, I recognize that each individual’s created meanings may differ from others’ readings of the same work. Therefore, my analysis of picture book images and text is simply an analysis of the meanings that *I* create in my reading; I interpret the depictions of characters and traits in my recognition of them. However, my ability to see and understand these characters and traits relies on the fact of my presence in a society in which they are present and meaningful, and in which each member shares my ability to recognize them. For example, I recognize the ritualistic performance of gender because I live within a society in which gender exists (Butler, 1990). I recognize race because race is a salient characteristic in my society. I recognize class markers as meaningful signs because I live in a society in which class markers exist and convey meaning. And so on.

Although as a function of my privileged social location I am incompletely equipped to fully reveal the cultural meanings of my texts, my feminist education allows me to attempt to do so, and it is from these meanings that I derive my analysis. To the extent that the meanings I lift from my sample are informed by a feminist

awareness and a familiarity with feminist analysis, my observations can be useful.

Conversely, to the extent that my privileged position impairs my ability to clearly identify racism, classism, looksism, heterosexism, ableism, and ageism in the books in my sample, my observations will contribute to the perpetuation of systematic inequality. Despite this paradox, it remains important for dominant group members to engage questions of oppression and privilege, rather than using it as an excuse to avoid such topics. Therefore, I will simply do my best to see through and around the shields of my privileged position while inviting, and remaining receptive to, further discussion and/or criticism.

My sample is the top ten best-selling children's picture books of 2006, according to lists published by Publishers Weekly (D. Roback, personal communication, June 18, 2007), comprising books published over the 65 year span from 1942 to 2007 (see appendix for the complete list). Four are board books (with pages of sturdy cardboard), two are interactive books with pages of heavy stock to which are attached various flaps, fold-outs, and other interactive novelties, and the remaining four are typical books with paper pages that tend to be available in both hardback and paperback versions.⁰ Four depict human characters, two depict animals behaving as animals, and five depict anthropomorphized characters. Two are about pirates, two are Dr. Seuss books, and two are Little Golden Books, one of which is an adaptation of an animated movie.

Except for a few studies, such as Anderson and Hamilton's (2005) study which included a variety of best selling books, Tepper and Cassidy's (1999) analysis of books to which children had actually been exposed, Brugeilles and colleagues' (2002) study

of all French picture books published in 1994, and those focusing on textbooks (Jackson & Gee, 2005; Wharton, 2005; Jassey, 1998), researchers have concentrated their efforts on award winning children's picture books, such as Caldecott award winners. This may create inherent limitations on the generalizability of their findings to either the entire body of children's books or to the selections of books that children actually encounter. I assert that the intentional provision of award winning books to a child is a manifestation of class privilege, as is the fact of book ownership in the first place, and the intentional purchase of certain books for children is an expression of entitlement which is assumed by privileged groups and not expected by others (see Lareau, 2003). Choosing my sample from best selling books is therefore intended to increase the relevance of the results to children's actual encounters with systematic oppression and privilege in books, assuming that books which sell the most copies in a given year are relatively more readily available to children in general.

Also assumed is that the majority of children are more likely to be exposed to books in a relatively random fashion, either books they happen to pick up or books that have been made available to them, than to be intentionally provided with award winning books. As Tepper and Cassidy (1999) point out, their list of books actually read to or by children contained no recent Caldecott winning titles. While it is true that parents, teachers, librarians, and others often do explicitly suggest award winning titles to children, I conclude that the best selling titles are, by definition, available to children both at home, school, and/or library with a somewhat greater frequency than other books, and that adults' preferences for award winning titles will be reflected in higher sales of those books, potentially placing those books within my sample anyway. Thus,

themes found in the ten best selling books of a given year can be reasonably expected to be the themes to which children are most frequently exposed as compared with any ten other books of that year.

The starting point of the quantitative aspect of my research is common to many feminist evaluations of children's books; the collection of frequency data of various significant attributes. In order to express my results concretely, and to make possible comparisons of my results with previous findings, I compiled a table of each character's role, gender, race, age, class, sexual identity, looks, ability, and the number of pages on which it appears.

Characters' roles were designated as falling into one of four categories. Main characters are those whom the book is about, revolves around, or unfolds in response to. Supporting characters are necessary to the plot, and respond to or interact with the main character/s. Incidental characters are present, either in illustration/s or text, and fill out the story but do not substantially contribute to the plot's progression. Main and supporting characters tend to briefly encounter or pass by incidental characters in the course of the book. Background characters, who tend to populate social settings, are present in illustration/s but are not mentioned in the text. Inanimate objects, such as the celestial bodies in two books and the animals depicted in paintings in *Goodnight Moon*, are not considered to be characters. When a character appears in an illustration and is mentioned in the text (or vice versa) on the same page, it is counted once, as a single appearance, because the unit of measurement is pages on which characters appear or are mentioned.

Because so few of the books in my sample depict human characters, while five

depict anthropomorphized animals or cars, it was challenging to establish coding criteria for nonhuman characters in many categories. Animal characters displaying human characteristics, such as speech, clothing, and use of household artifacts, were coded in all categories. When animals are present in text or illustrations *as animals*, however, I classified them as “n/a” regarding class, race, family structure, sexual identity, age, looks, and ability. For example, the dogs in *The Poky Little Puppy* speak to each other and sleep under blankets, so they are assessed in all categories, while the caterpillar, lizard, and other creatures they encounter in the course of the story are not. Non-anthropomorphic animals which are androgynously depicted are coded as gender not specified, except in the case of one animal, the water buffalo in *Panda Bear, Panda Bear, What Do You See?*, which is male, although whether a child reader would make this distinction is open to speculation.⁰

Because six of my ten books depicted no human characters, and because not all anthropomorphized non-human characters were clearly marked as female or male by the use of feminine or masculine pronouns, coding characters’ gender proved to be more challenging than I expected. Segel (1982) argues against assuming that animals whose gender is not specified are male; given the reality of androcentrism, however, I concluded that it is appropriate to assume that maleness is implied if gender is not specified. We know when we are meant to recognize a drawn character as female, because we are given clues; the trappings of femininity, including skirts, long hair, makeup, ribbons, ruffles, high heeled shoes, flowers printed on fabrics or adorning hats, certain colors, and accessories, such as purses, signal femaleness (Brownmiller, 1984). Illustrated anthropomorphized characters lacking specific feminine markers are

recognized as male, because if feminine markers were present, the character would be unequivocally female. My daughter, for example, interprets long eyelashes as signaling femaleness; by default she assumes that characters lacking exaggerated eyelashes are male. In a binary sex/gender system lacking additional taxa, one who is not female is, by default and therefore by definition, male. Girls drawn without feminine markers of hair and dress look like boys. Brownmiller (1984) reports anecdotally the difficulty faced by an artist who, when charged with drawing a group of girls and boys playing an egalitarian softball game, found herself at a loss to depict girls without resorting to drawing them in skirts and pigtails.

When coding anthropomorphized characters for race, I follow Fondrie (2004) in applying McIntosh's (2007) concept of the "invisible knapsack" to characters' racial identification. One manifestation of race privilege - one goodie in the invisible knapsack - is the fiction that one is raceless; thus, to be of nonspecified race signifies dominant group membership. Although, strictly speaking, human categories of race do not apply to animals or cars, when such characters were not depicted as Other, or were present in contrast to a few Others (as in *Cars*), I recognized them as being recipients of race privilege and coded them as dominant group members. Even though characters experiencing racial oppression are not present in the story, racism, in the form of the normalization of whiteness and the embodiment of "the power, status, and privilege that so often accompany whiteness," is present, even when dominant group members are not present (Fondrie, 2004, p. 17).

Characters were generally easily identifiable as either adults or children, except for a few: The two cabin boys in *Pirateology*, McQueen in *Cars*, Sam in *Green Eggs*

and *Ham* and “You” in *Oh, The Places You’ll Go!*, are of ambiguous age but appear to be young adults. One character, the female bunny in *Goodnight Moon*, is described as old.

Because pirates operate outside the generally established social structure, the question of to which class category they belong was resolved in coding of both pirate books by the relative designations of pirates as middle class, rulers, governors, and queens as ruling class, and servants and slaves as working class. In other books, class categorization depended on class markers, such as occupation, household artifacts, or characters’ life expectations. For example, the occupation of the fire truck character in *Cars*, the bunny’s bedroom in *Goodnight Moon*, and assumption of life choices in *Oh, the Places You’ll Go!* are all markers indicating middle class status. When anthropomorphic animal characters’ environments contained no human artifacts, such as in *Guess How Much I Love You*, class was coded as not specified.

Coding for sexual identity was fairly simple *prima facie*, as sexuality is not emphasized in children’s books. A dating relationship between Sally and McQueen in *Cars* is implied, three background characters on the train in *Green Eggs and Ham* are depicted as a heterosexual nuclear family, and several pirates are indicated as having heterosexual relationships. I refused, however, to code characters as heterosexual when their sexual identity was not indicated. To do so would be to reinforce heterosexist norms and to deny the possibility of “queering” each text by “finding our queer selves affirmed and present, whether intentionally or not” (Huskey, 2002, p. 70).

In the categories of looks and ability, there was little explicit information on which to base coding decisions, so I applied criteria similar to my coding of race to both

categories. A few characters are specifically designated in the text (Sally in *Cars* and several male pirates in *Pirates: Most Wanted*) or illustrations (such as Anne Bonny in *Pirateology*) as attractive, but most characters' appearance is not remarked upon. There are two instances of physical disability; a one-legged character is described as "lame," and passing mention is made of another character having lost an arm in combat (both in *Pirateology*), but no books mention any other types of disabilities. Many characters are pictured or described as performing physically athletic feats (fighting, running, racing, etc.), and could on that basis be coded as physically able, but most characters' ability status is not specifically indicated. No books mentioned non-visible types of disability, such as blindness, learning disabilities, and so forth. In order to indicate the extent to which picture books express looksist and ableist cultural assumptions of normality, characters with unspecified ability status were coded as "normal" in both categories except in the few cases in which text or illustrations provided additional information. After I completed the initial coding and compiled the data into a table, I did some basic math and, for comparison purposes, created tables of the categories in which the results were particularly interesting, such as gender and race of characters (see Appendix).

The coding process became a valuable starting point for my qualitative analysis because it forced me to thoroughly define my categories of interest, and the frequency table I compiled was an important resource as I considered overall themes. However, as many researchers have pointed out, simply counting attributes and crunching the resulting numbers may not necessarily be the best method of critically examining children's books. Clark, Kulkin, and Clancy (1999) charge Weitzman et. al. with emphasizing a liberal feminist perspective to the exclusion of a thorough consideration

including race, class, and age, and criticize liberal feminist researchers who fail to acknowledge findings indicating increases in both the number of female characters and the range of characteristics associated with female characters. Overall, they charge, feminist critiques of children's literature fail to incorporate the development of multicultural perspectives in feminist theory, and neglect to acknowledge individuals' own values, such as the specific set of "female" values that Gilligan reports (1982, as cited in Clark et al., 1999). Rather, Clark et al. (1999) advocate the use of multicultural qualitative research methodologies which approach books by "'listening' to themes of oppression and resistance ... rather than 'looking for' evidence to support one hypothesis or another" (p. 81).

Therefore, following Clark et al. (1999) and Hurley and Chadwick (1998), my analysis is not based on a set of predefined themes or a checklist of categories. Instead, as do Caldwell-Wood and Mitten (1991), my primary method was to pose to each book a series of questions (see appendix for complete list), in order to allow themes to emerge, a process Strauss and Corbin (1998) refer to as theories being "elaborated and modified" (p. 159). After having randomized the order of the books, I asked the research questions of each one and recorded the answers. After collecting data from all books, rather than looking for evidence supporting a hypothesis (Clark et al., 1999), I sorted the data by question and grouped answers to related questions. When this process was complete, I was able to identify what the books depicted in terms of gender, race, class, ability, looks, age, and sexual identity, although there is very little material in some categories. In addition, several major themes immediately emerged (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Hurley & Chadwick, 1998). Drawing themes from the sample, rather than

defining my categories beforehand and forcing my data to conform to them, honors Clark et al.'s (1999) call for the expansion of feminist critique from the limitations of liberal feminism.

Because my evaluation of these books occurred during a particular period of time, as well as from my own particular social location and current perspective, another evaluator, or myself at another time, might come up with a different set of results. I invite others to scrutinize both the books in my sample and my analyses, and to point out any aspects of systematic inequality that I have missed.

5. Results

Our basic hypothesis is that in illustrated books, female characters are given minor roles, and endowed with physical traits, character and personality, roles, social status that are generic, undifferentiated, and stereotypical to an extent verging on caricature, and that bear little relation to the real world. Conversely, male characters have more gratifying roles, even though they are just as stereotypical. A secondary hypothesis follows from this sexual asymmetry; relations between the sexes are unequal and hierarchal, and illustrated children's books will rarely show a mixed world where boys and girls, men and women, are seen to cohabit, relate, communicate and exchange on an equal footing. The world of illustrated children's books will be one of discrimination, segregation and sexual hierarchy (Brugeilles et al., 2002, p. 241).

My results were largely congruent with Brugeilles et al.'s (2002) conclusions.

Analysis of this sample reveals that dominant group members are fundamentally overrepresented in all categories; although a sizeable proportion (46%) of all characters are non-anthropomorphized animals which are therefore not subject to coding in all categories, when characters can be coded in all categories, white, male, able-bodied, heterosexual, middle-class, attractive and adult individuals are present most often. Nonwhite, female, disabled, non-heterosexual, working class, unattractive individuals, and children are either not present or are present in disproportionately small numbers.

Two books, *Pirateology* and *Oh, The Places You'll Go!*, are specifically narrated by individuals who receive privilege in all areas. Although the remaining books are narrated by an unidentified omniscient voice, their perspective is also, by default, that of the dominant group. The voice of the dominant group/s is one which ignores or excludes marginalized Others, and the books in this sample do this on all counts.

After brief consideration of sexism, racism, classism, ableism, looksism, ageism, heterosexism, and family composition, three major emergent themes, white privilege, overall portrayal of femininity, and male characters' reckless disregard for others, will be developed in greater detail. I will then explore the reversal of several gender roles and, finally, discuss the potential to queer these books. Because none of the picture books in my sample contained numbered pages, page numbers are not given for quoted material.

Sexism is present in the form of male domination in both the sheer number of male characters and in male characters' actions. Qualitatively, males are significantly overrepresented and females are significantly underrepresented; only 16.7% of all 156 gender-specific characters (humans and anthropomorphized animals) are female, while 83.3% are male. Of gendered main characters, only 9.5% are female, while 90.5% are male. While forty percent of supporting characters are female, only 5% of all characters are supporting characters; six out of those fifteen supporting characters are female. Most stories are about male characters, revolve around the activities of male characters, and are told from the perspective of male characters. When females have been coded as main characters, their main character status is subordinated to that of male characters. Of the two female main characters, one (a pirate) is the object of pursuit by a male

character (a pirate hunter), but the story (*Pirateology*) is told entirely from the perspective of the male character. The other female main character is one of eleven main characters whose stories are told in *Pirates: Most Wanted*, and shares main character status with ten male main characters. Throughout the sample, males are portrayed being in charge of situations, in active roles, and in roles commanding authority. When they are present at all, females are portrayed in subordinate roles and in stereotypically feminine ways. In *Cars*, the most prominent of two minor female characters is consistently drawn smaller than the main character, and is positioned behind him in the scene in which she is most active. Androcentrism is particularly evident in the pirate books, in both of which “pirate” is equated with “men.”

Racism is evident in the form of the normalization of whiteness, the paucity of nonwhite characters, and the stereotypical, trivialized, and/or derogatory manner in which the few nonwhite characters are portrayed. Of the 176 characters which could be classified into a racial group, 90.3% are white and less than 10% are nonwhite. All 17 nonwhite characters are incidental characters and none play more than a passing role in a story; none speak, and none of the stories are told from the perspective of nonwhite characters. Stereotyped portrayals are depicted in *Pirateology*, in which illustrations of Chinese pirates and Barbary Corsairs are explicitly intended to depict these particular nonwhite groups as exotic, strange, and dangerous, as well as in *Cars*, in which an Italian character is marked as nonwhite by his hat. Nonwhites are trivialized by being present only in service to white supremacy. In both pirate books, white pirates encounter nonwhites occasionally in their travels, in which context the nonwhites represent the exotic Other. In *Cars*, a character is marked as nonwhite by his name, “Ramone,” which

appears to be an attempt to diversify an almost entirely white milieu, but is falsely so.

Although similar to Ramon and Ramón, Catalan and Spanish masculine names, respectively, it is not an actual name in any language (behindthename.com). Nonwhite characters are derogated in *Piratology* as “ugly” and “ferocious.”

When class is relevant, the middle class is normalized; structural economic inequality is not identified or condemned. The realities of contemporary life under conditions of economic oppression are not depicted. Rather, *Oh, The Places You’ll Go!* expresses strictly middle class ideals and expectations of personal achievement, educational attainment, many life choices, and much personal agency. In *Goodnight Moon*, the anthropomorphized bunny’s spacious, well-appointed bedroom bespeaks class privilege. In both pirate books, colonialist invasion and capitalistic greed are taken for granted. White pirates’ relative rank is indicated by their clothing. Captains are dressed in elaborate, brightly colored clothing, while crew members wear simple, drably colored clothing.

Ableism is evident in that nearly all characters are either depicted as or assumed to be able and able-bodied; except for two physically disabled characters in *Pirateology*, disabled individuals are not identified. All main characters are physically able-bodied; in *Oh, The Places You’ll Go!*, athletes, musicians, background characters, and the main character are depicted running, hopping, climbing, and perching. The hares in *Guess How Much I Love You* hop, tumble, and stretch before retiring, the puppies in *The Poky Little Puppy* tumble and explore, and pirates in both pirate books fight, capture, sail, and explore. Sam blithely pursues the Cat in the Hat up and down hills, up a tree, over a cliff, through a tunnel, into a body of water, and back to dry land. The mental and

emotional ability of all characters is assumed by the lack of characters portrayed with non-visible disabilities.

Except for descriptions of both male and female pirates, who are sometimes explicitly described in (often gendered) terms of attractiveness, characters are rarely described in terms of their looks. However, only four books (*Pirateology*, *Pirates: Most Wanted*, *Oh, The Places You'll Go!*, and *Panda Bear, Panda Bear, What Do You See?*) depict human characters, and animals (anthropomorphized or not) cannot quite be said to be attractive in the same terms as are applied to humans. Because there are no indicators that characters do not enjoy looks privilege, my conclusion, although it is necessarily weak, is that my sample normalizes those holding looks privilege.

Ageism is apparent in the fact that most characters are adults; only five percent of all characters are children. Except for the “dreaming child,” who appears once in *Panda Bear, Panda Bear, What Do You See?* and a serving maid, who appears once as a background character in *Pirateology*, child characters are depicted as in the care and under the control of adults. Bedtime is commonly depicted, with Little Nutbrown Hare, the puppies, and the nameless bunny are put to bed by Big Nutbrown Hare, the mother dog, and the “quiet old lady” in *Guess How Much I Love You*, *The Poky Little Puppy*, and *Goodnight Moon*, respectively. In *Guess How Much I Love You*, Little Nutbrown Hare is allowed to initiate a boisterous bedtime game of exchanging increasingly extravagant expressions of love, but when the child becomes too sleepy to continue and falls asleep, Big Nutbrown Hare reasserts control in the form of making the final, ultimate expression of love. The mother in *The Poky Little Puppy*, the only adult character specifically identified as a parent, metes out punishment when the puppies are

caught digging holes under the fence, while the adult bunny in *Goodnight Moon* quietly admonishes the child bunny to “hush.” Two adults accompany the anonymous child on the surreal train ride in *Green Eggs and Ham*, and although their expressions remain unchanged throughout, their presence reinforces the legitimacy of adults’ control over children. The only character designated as elderly is the “quiet old lady” bunny in *Goodnight Moon*, who, in a highly stereotypical portrayal of an elderly female, is only depicted seated in a rocking chair.

Heterosexuality is normalized by the omission of other sexual identities. Most characters’ sexual identities are not specified, which reinforces the expectation that the normal, or default, sexual identity is heterosexual, and that any variation from heterosexuality is abnormal. Further, all characters whose sexual identity is specified are heterosexual, and heterosexual intimate relationships are portrayed as the norm. McQueen and Sally’s dating relationship is implied in illustrations, women pirates in *Pirateology* are primarily described in terms of their heterosexual attachments to men, and several male pirates are described as having heterosexual encounters with women.

Family structures throughout the sample are remarkably open-ended, and no particular structure is emphasized. Children are cared for by adults in *Goodnight Moon* and *Guess How Much I Love You*, but their parental status is not specified. The mother dog in *The Poky Little Puppy* is apparently a single parent, and no adults accompany the dreaming child in *Panda Bear, Panda Bear, What Do You See?* Only two heterosexual nuclear families are portrayed, both in minor background roles; Chinese pirate captains’ families live aboard ship in *Pirateology* and three characters in *Green Eggs and Ham* appear to be a family. Sam, the Cat in the Hat, the protagonist of *Oh, The Places You’ll*

Go!, all the car characters, and the caterpillar are not portrayed as members of families.

The first major theme which emerged from my analysis is that racism and white privilege are visible throughout the sample. White characters indeed “embody the power, status, and privilege that so often accompany whiteness” (Fondrie, 2004, p. 17). Nearly all human characters are portrayed as whites, the norm according to which others differ. *Pirateology* and *Pirates: Most Wanted* are ostensibly about pirates, but are in fact about *white* pirates. In both books, pirates’ whiteness is revealed in illustrations, and the text refers to them as Europeans, but without acknowledging their race privilege. Pirates of non-dominant racial groups are linguistically marked; nonwhite pirates are specifically referred to as Chinese or Barbary pirates.

Though it could be argued that nonhuman anthropomorphic characters are raceless, such characters’ race privilege is indicated by the lack of attention paid to race; bunnies, hares, puppies, cars, and Seuss creatures are simply normal. The puppies in *The Poky Little Puppy* roam freely, exploring their environs unhindered. In *Green Eggs and Ham*, the Cat and Sam move through the world unhindered, from car to train to boat. The Cat is free to express dismissal and dislike of Sam without repercussions, and Sam is free to pursue the Cat and attempt to convince him to taste the green eggs and ham. These liberties are not available to all, and in the real world in which readers of these books live, they are distributed based on race. My entire sample of books ignores the realities of race privilege and oppression, which indicates racism; white supremacy makes possible the freedom to ignore such topics and just focus on the stories, a privilege nonwhite individuals do not enjoy.

The few superficially and stereotypically depicted nonwhites (in *Cars*,

Pirateology and *Pirates: Most Wanted*) are present for the benefit of dominant group members; they appear in an attempt to “diversify” an otherwise all-white milieu (in *Cars*) or serve as dramatic foils for white activity (in *Pirateology*). Whereas most characters in *Cars* are marked as members of the dominant group, three incidental characters are superficially marked as nonwhite by their names: Luigi and Guido, who are portrayed as a pair and are never individually identified, and Ramone, a faux nonwhite character.

Similarly, nonwhite pirate characters in *Pirateology* are differentiated as Others with stereotypical clothing, hair styles, and weapons of choice, but are simultaneously portrayed with facial features and skin tones barely different than those of whites. For example, Barbary Corsairs from the Ottoman Empire are depicted wearing “traditional dress of the Muslim lands of the North African coast” in several illustrations, but their facial features and coloring appear to be white. Chinese pirates are pictured very stereotypically in hair styles and dress, and are specifically described as being “very different from our Caribbean pirates.”

In addition to being depicted stereotypically, nonwhite pirates are described in particularly negative terms. While *Pirateology*’s protagonist’s crew members are all white, the members of the antagonist’s “ferocious crew” include several of the few nonwhite people depicted, and are described as “an ugly bunch of desperate renegades from the four corners of the globe and a danger to all good and honest seafaring men.” In observing and describing a battle between two groups of nonwhite pirates, the protagonist describes them as simultaneously more violent and less competent than whites; while both sides were “ferocious,” the Maltese victors “managed” to ram a

Barbary ship.

All pirates exert dominance as a matter of course; however, white pirates' savage attacking and plundering of the "curious" and exotic locales they visit is described as brutal but is not identified as a gendered, racist, colonialist political expansion project. White pirates attack other countries, such as Panama, Cuba, and Ecuador, with no mention of how this played a part in the colonialization of the world by whites; a white male pirate is depicted as "returning to Jamaica as its governor" with no mention of colonialization or his gender. Enslaved Africans and others are mentioned briefly and nonchalantly in *Pirateology*; in one instance, the captivity of galley slaves is noted and dismissed by the protagonist, who hopes to eventually "return to rescue as many of them" as possible, but sails away without attempting to do so.

Oh, the Places You'll Go! is problematic from a variety of perspectives; it is racist, classist, sexist, ableist, looksist, exemplifies the myth of meritocracy and the bootstrap myth, and glorifies the capitalist value of individual success. Although the title seems to indicate that the book's intended audience is neutral, the main character is clearly an able-bodied, normal-looking, middle-class, young adult, white male. The text makes a variety of assumptions about educational attainment, many life choices, and much personal success, for example, that are embedded in unearned privilege. Though he is assumed to encounter "many strange birds," the message is that the challenges posed by those "birds" will be slight and easily avoided, a message foreign to nonwhite individuals and women. The "strange birds" which women and nonwhite individuals encounter have definite power to cause harm and block access to resources. People facing systematic oppression do not need to be reminded that "sadly, it's true - that

Bang-ups - and Hang-ups - *can* happen to you” (*Oh, the Places You’ll Go!*). It is implied that these negative incidents are impersonal and random; they coincidentally occur and can be reversed. This cavalier attitude toward bad things happening is only relevant to those whose privilege has protected them from the realities of oppression. Target group members recognize that negative incidents which they experience are often the direct result of one’s personal attribute/s and are not random, but occur predictably and systematically and often cannot be reversed.

The main character in *Oh, the Places You’ll Go!* is assumed to be in control of his life and capable of achieving success. He is exhorted to “face up to [his] problems - whatever they are,” implying that personal solutions (“Somehow you’ll escape”) are appropriate and effective. For individuals facing systematic oppression, life is more complicated than simply a “Great Balancing Act” requiring “care and great tact” for successful navigation. Success is depicted as a function of one’s own actions - “Just never forget to be dexterous and deft / And *never* mix up your right foot with your left” - and there is no mention of the formidable structural barriers that oppressed individuals face. There is no acknowledgment of the contribution of the many and varied benefits of white privilege, such as obtaining a home mortgage more easily and at a lower rate than a person of color.

The second major emergent theme is the collective portrayal of femininity. Female characters are largely missing from this sample, but those present are stereotypically feminine, perform reproductive tasks, and are defined in relation to males when they do appear. The female character on the train in *Green Eggs and Ham*, the woman in a ski outfit and the woman seated with a bird in the background of one

scene in *Oh, The Places You'll Go!*, the minimal presence of only two female cars in *Cars*, and the “quiet old lady who was whispering ‘hush’” in *Goodnight Moon* embody the passive core of femininity. While male pirates become noblemen, write journals and books, navigate, are granted government licences, purchase ships, set up lucrative trade deals and in general have “spectacular career[s],” female pirates are not rewarded with power in the same way; one commits suicide, two are jailed, and another retires.

The importance of beauty to the performance of femininity is blatantly expressed in *Cars*. In this book, Sally is described as being attractive in McQueen’s estimation (“She was a lawyer. McQueen thought Sally was pretty.”) although none of the other characters are so described. The placement of McQueen’s opinion immediately following Sally’s identification as a lawyer implies that, for women, being pretty is at least as important as being smart. Recognition of Sally as an intelligent, powerful woman is immediately countered by a statement indicating that she is sufficiently feminine. This compensatory response assuages the fear that perhaps the woman in question is not feminine enough; if a woman must be smart, she must also be pretty (Brownmiller, 1984).

Women’s agency in two books is mediated by male consent. Although Sally is a lawyer, and although her arrival in court (and subsequent suggestion that McQueen fix the damage he caused) catalyzes the remainder of the plot, her agency is undermined by the text’s specification that the townsfolk agree with her before she makes a deal with the judge. She merely makes the suggestion, which the others, all but one of whom are male, validate. Similarly, the one female pirate captain in *Pirates: Most Wanted* is described as being “elected” the “leader” of the ship whose captain she killed, and she

then “led the pirates on raids.” Whereas male captains are depicted as taking command with no input from others, her leadership was approved by men, which attenuates her portrayal as an authoritative agent.

The striking contrast between words used to describe women and men in *Pirates: Most Wanted* reflect and uphold norms of femininity. Although also censured for their “ferocious,” “cruel and unnatural” fighting ways, female pirates are also often described in terms which emphasize their youth and beauty: “beautiful and spirited,” “barely eighteen years old,” “strikingly beautiful with dark, penetrating eyes,” and “passionate and spirited.” These descriptions are in stark contrast to the terms used to describe male pirates, which occasionally emphasize their looks but which also attribute wealth, respect, audacity, bravery, and leadership to men.

Female characters are typically associated with the performance of reproductive labor. In *Pirateology*, the only reference to reproductive labor is a serving maid pictured in a depiction of a tavern scene. *Goodnight Moon* depicts a female bunny wearing a skirt and apron and knitting as she cares for a child bunny. In *Cars*, a female character, Flo, serves McQueen a can of oil, which he drinks as she watches. A background scene in *Oh, The Places You’ll Go!* - the only scene in that book depicting any female characters - depicts a woman waiting for a teakettle to boil and a woman standing in line behind a baby buggy. This conflation of femaleness with motherhood is also evident in *Green Eggs and Ham*, in which the female background character is depicted with a child, and in both pirate books, both of which mention that women pirates escape being hung because they were, or claimed to be, pregnant. Although she does not appear in illustrations, the mother dog in *The Poky Little Puppy* appears in the text only in the

context of the home; she is associated with food and child care.

Several of the few women characters are primarily defined in relation to males. Sally's purpose in *Cars* is to be McQueen's love interest; after the courtroom scene, she appears only as his date. The female background character in *Green Eggs and Ham* is associated with one of the male background characters. The pirate books are particularly explicit in describing female pirates in relation to men. Women's motivations for embarking upon lives of piracy are frequently in response to men: "Charlotte de Berry fell in love with a sailor and disguised herself as a man in order to accompany him to sea;" "Anne fell in love with a sea captain ... and eloped with him;" "there she met the notorious pirate captain "Calico Jack" Rackham and ran away with him." Their heterosexual relationships are nearly always indicated to reassure homophobic readers that these abnormal women were not lesbians: Mary "fell in love with a soldier. The two were married;" "she fought by his side in six battles;" "Eventually Charlotte married a wealthy Spaniard." One woman pirate committed suicide in heartbreak over a man: "she jumped overboard to join her husband in death."

In addition to definitions of women pirates in terms of their relationships with men, both pirate books define women's sexuality as a product subject to appropriation and consumption by men. It is one of the "everyday commodities" to be purchased on shore in *Pirateology*, while in *Pirates: Most Wanted*, "pirates dreamed of time ashore, where they could spend their loot on drink, gambling, and women." One female pirate had the opportunity to become a pirate because she was "carried off to sea" by a sailor who "took a shine to her" (*Pirates: Most Wanted*). Contradictorily, the "Captain's Articles" (pirate codes of conduct) in *Pirates: Most Wanted* mandate chivalry; men who

“meet with a prudent Woman” and “meddle[s] with her, without her Consent, shall suffer present Death” and “if any man were to be found seducing any of the female sex, and carried her to sea, disguised, he was to suffer death.” Women’s superior virtue, their vulnerable social position, and the importance of women dressing only in feminine attire are simultaneously reinforced.

Pirateology and *Pirates: Most Wanted* convey a complex message about femininity; while women pirates are depicted as acting as agents within the confines of patriarchy, their depiction, particularly that of Arabella Drummond in *Pirateology*, is problematic in a variety of ways. Women’s stories are told from the perspective of men, women’s gender nonconformity is presented as unnatural instead of legitimized, and women’s resistance to oppression is not identified as such. Misogyny and androcentrism are evident throughout; one character derides the idea of carrying citrus fruits as an “old wives’ tale” in *Pirateology*, and ships are referred to by feminine pronouns in both books. This custom of feminizing boats, cars, and other vehicles is, to me, a misogynist extension of the definition of female sexuality as a vessel for male sexuality.

Pirateology’s plot is fundamentally misogynous. The fact that the villain in this book is female, despite the fact that there is no historical basis for her character, reinforces the hate and mistrust of women under the guise of including them.

Both books depict powerful, gender nonconforming women characters while simultaneously reinforcing norms of femininity. They emphasize that women could not be pirates in their own right, as women, but had to successfully impersonate men in order to do so. Women pirates are described as “cruel and unnatural” ostensibly because they dress as men and are violent, but ultimately because they transgress the norms of

femininity. Both books call attention to the deviance of cross-dressing women: “dressed as a man, this female pirate in typical soldier’s clothing would have shocked society” (*Pirates: Most Wanted*). There is no recognition of women preferring men’s clothing and activities as a legitimate form of gender expression; all cross-dressing women dress as men as a means to another end, not as an end in itself. Only women are depicted as gender-variant; while some women adopt men’s clothing and other aspects of masculinity, no men cross-dress or display aspects of femininity.

Although *Pirateology* mentions both men and women in the definition of “pirate,” the implicit attitude that “pirate” does not equal “female” is evident in the use of male pronouns in collective references to pirates. “Female” does not equal “person,” either; a “lady naturalist” is mentioned multiple times in *Pirateology*. Female pirates are also habitually marked as female, and the only ones depicted are marked as exceptional: “to succeed in a man’s world, women pirates needed courage, strength, and ferocity. Those who possessed such qualities could wield a cutlass, ax, or pistol as well as the next sailor!” (*Pirates: Most Wanted*). Adult males are pirates; the few females who are pirates are unique aberrations from the norm. Ordinary, mediocre women pirates are not present, whereas ordinary, mediocre men pirates are.

Pirateology is a fictional journal kept by a male pirate hunter, Captain Lubber, describing his adventures in the course of searching for Arabella Drummond, a female pirate. The story is told from his perspective, through “journal entries” and side notes, with many fold-out flaps, notes, and other novelties attached to the pages. Illustrations are explained as the result of “taking some artists [along on the journey] to make a pictorial record.” Although Drummond is a strong female figure who in the course of

the story exhibits resistance to patriarchy, frees herself and others from captivity, commands ships, outwits Lubber and ultimately evades capture, her portrayal remains consistent with norms of femininity. She is allowed to stretch the limits of her gender role, but not to fully escape them.

The path by which Drummond became a pirate is quite typical compared with male pirates; she joined the military (to escape an unwanted arranged marriage) and became a pirate incidentally, after having been captured as a galley slave and freeing herself. The title of a small book from which the reader obtains much of the available information about her, “The Life and Strange, Surprising Adventures of Arabella Drummond,” however, emphasizes her gender transgression; her life and adventures are only strange and surprising because they happened to a woman. The captain refers to her as a “particularly nasty pirate,” but the book refers to several pirates whose behavior is much more violent. Further, Lubber’s note that “[a]lthough hers is a sad story, it in no way excuses her crimes or misdeeds” strikes me as a patronizing indication that her life course is inappropriate because she is female. Similar incidents in male pirates’ lives are not described as sad.

Despite her strength and agency, Drummond displays a variety of compensatory feminine attributes. She is beautiful, nurturing to animals (she is a naturalist and adopts and cares for a cat), and abhors slavery (in empathy, she frees the slaves on board one of the ships she captures). She is not portrayed as being a pirate for the same reasons men are portrayed as being pirates, to obtain wealth and power. The primary motivation for her pirate behavior is an unknown relationship with Blackbeard (she is rumored to be his sister, cousin, or childhood sweetheart), which substantiates her legitimacy as a

pirate. First she searches for him, and then, when he is killed, she becomes angry and goes on a pillaging rampage of revenge. Finally, on the same page on which the reader learns that Drummond has outwitted Lubber, it is revealed that Drummond is retiring from piracy to open a retirement haven for former pirates, and will probably be pardoned, a conclusion which brings an otherwise strong female character safely back within the bounds of femininity.

The most striking major theme which emerged from my analysis of this sample of picture books is that of male characters' reckless disregard for others. Other elements of masculinity are also present throughout the sample. Men in both pirate books are violent and dominating, and all male characters in all books are depicted as being independent agents. Both main male characters in *Green Eggs and Ham* are active, aggressive, and assert themselves freely, while males in the background drive the boat, car, and train. The male main character in *Oh, The Places You'll Go!* is described as being independent, a decision maker, intelligent, successful, prepared, a problem solver, and having personal agency. Except for *Guess How Much I Love You*, which depicts a male character in a nurturing caretaking role, male characters are consistently careless, selfish, taking advantage of others, and are often destructive. The poky puppy wanders off, an arrogant race car destroys the main street, Sam blithely drives his passengers off a cliff, a young white male's success is described as a function of surpassing others, and pirates pillage and conquer. Other characters, the other puppies, the townsfolk, the characters waving goodbye from the water, the unnamed others over whom the white male succeeds, and the pirates' victims, either solve male characters' problems or are not mentioned.

The main character in *The Poky Little Puppy* joins his siblings in digging forbidden holes under the fence to go exploring, then disappears. The other puppies eventually notice he is missing and search for him, but he is unapologetic about having caused them worry and effort. Later, after the other puppies arrive home and are punished for having dug the hole, he enjoys the dessert they were denied and goes happily to bed. This pattern repeats itself several times, until one day when the poky puppy is finally deprived of dessert because he arrived late. Even then, his only reaction is to feel “very sorry for himself.”

Cars depicts a greater degree of careless destruction than digging holes under fences, but McQueen, the main character, is at least credited with achieving a measure of personal growth in the course of the story. McQueen is an arrogant male race car whose attitude problem has alienated his pit crew. En route to a big race, McQueen ends up wreaking havoc in a small town’s main street. Being forced to fix it, he initially does a haphazard job, is reproached by a dominant male, and fixes the road properly. He is then forgiven, and “thanked all his new friends by getting spiffed up - Radiator Springs [the name of the small town] style!” The “spiffing up” process involves several of them servicing him; male characters change his tires, give him a new paint job, and power wash him, and a female character gives him a refreshing can of oil. The townsfolk fix their storefronts with no apparent hard feelings and the happy ending to the story is that McQueen makes it to the race in time, with a new pit crew composed of his new friends, who have apparently given up their jobs in order to do this.

In *Green Eggs and Ham*, Sam literally accosts the Cat in the Hat with the platter of green foods. When the Cat takes off, Sam pursues him, and the Cat becomes a

helpless passenger on a surreal car, train, and boat journey which ends with everyone crashing into a body of water. When the Cat finally gives in, tries the green eggs and ham, and discovers that he likes it, he immediately thanks Sam; the hapless train, boat, and car passengers, meanwhile, have been watching them with interest from the water, and then, smiling, wave them onto dry land.

As previously discussed in the context of white privilege, the male main character of *Oh, The Places You'll Go!* is depicted as becoming “the winning-est winner of all” who is “famous as famous can be.” He is portrayed as achieving success over others: “You’ll pass the whole gang and you’ll soon take the lead;” “you’ll be best of the best;” “you will top all the rest.” Those at the expense of whom he succeeds are not accounted for. Likewise, pirates’ victims in *Pirates: Most Wanted* are not mentioned; *Pirateology* also ignores victims, and the story is told from the perspective of the male actors and ignores family members’ lives. For example, if Lubbock has a family waiting for him in Boston, they are not mentioned. The lives and experiences of the wives and children of the Chinese pirate captains’ families, who are described as living on the ships, are not explored. Their existence is noted, used to explain elements of the captains’ behavior, and dismissed.

In several books, the question of how the stories would be different if the genders of certain characters were reversed is a interesting one. In *Guess How Much I Love You*, if both characters were female, the physical and verbal competition would be somewhat incongruous. The overall theme of nurturance and expressed love would be very unremarkable, however, particularly if Big Nutbrown Hare was female. The mother dog’s ineffectual scolding in *The Poky Little Puppy* fits expectations of mothers,

because a measure of incompetence is consistent with femininity, but if a father displayed identical behavior, he would appear to be an ineffective parent, because incompetence is inconsistent with masculinity. If the old lady bunny in *Goodnight Moon* was male, knitting would be a gender deviant behavior, and if the caterpillar in *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* was female, eating all that food would be inconsistent with feminine gender norms. Likewise, it would be incongruous if the Cat and Sam in *Green Eggs and Ham* were female, since their active, assertive behaviors are inconsistent with femininity.

Cars would be a very different book if the main character was a female car; if changing McQueen's gender was the only difference, the story would portray a gender nonconforming female, and her actions would likely be portrayed very differently. Instead of an innocently bumbling male causing a problem that is rectified by a host of other characters' making things right (emotionally, in tolerating and forgiving McQueen, and physically, in them cleaning up the mess he made), a female protagonist's mistake would have been attributed to her gender and she would not have enjoyed such universal support from the town.

The references to choices, agency and success in *Oh, The Places You'll Go!* are incongruous with femininity. If addressed to young women, it would refer to seeking, achieving, and maintaining interpersonal relationships, and if to individuals with less unearned privilege, many aspects would be different. The story's assumptions would include awareness of systematically imposed barriers; illustrations would depict mobility device users facing the lack of ramps, lesbians facing a disheartening sea of heterosexual couples, women encountering the glass ceiling, attractive people moving to

the front of the line, and so forth.

In several areas, these books can be queered, or interpreted in ways that affirm nonheterosexual identities and/or nonconforming gender expression. The ambiguously gendered human background characters in *Oh, The Places You'll Go* can be interpreted as genderqueer. Several characters in my sample lend themselves to interpretation as lesbian, gay, or bisexual even when they are not specifically indicated as such. Big Nutbrown Hare, the nurturing male caregiver in *Guess How Much I Love You*, the adult bunny in *Goodnight Moon*, Dr. Seuss' characters The Cat in the Hat and Sam, and tire shop owners Guido and Luigi (in *Cars*) can all be subversively interpreted as gay. Female pirates' practice of passing for men, although described by both pirate books as an expediency, can also be viewed as suggestive of butch, transgender, or genderqueer identity.

Overall, the "world" depicted by the top ten best-selling picture books of 2006 is one which contains a variety of racist, sexist, classist, looksist, ableist, and heterosexist messages. Dominant group member characters are over-represented, and dominant group members do not "cohabit, relate, communicate and exchange on an equal footing" with oppressed group members (Brugilles et al., 2002, p. 241). Racism and white privilege are present in most books, the few female characters are depicted in stereotypical ways, and male characters display a striking lack of concern for others. However, there are several encouraging aspects of these books. Family structures are depicted in a variety of ways, one book depicts a nurturant, loving male character, and subversive queer readings of several books is possible.

6. Discussion

Added to the myriad other sources of problematic ideology which are constantly encountered by children, the picture books in my sample contribute to the perpetuation of inequality in society. Children can be taught critical literacy skills which will allow them to both read the text and decode the meanings contained therein (Freire, 2000, as cited in Hurley, 2005). The mass-market adults' guide to children's books I envision would serve as this sort of valuable critical literacy tool; rather than condemning picture books en masse or exhorting adults to get rid of all problematic books, the point is for adults to become aware of systematic inequality in children's books as well as teaching children to think critically.

Louie (2001) charges authors with the "undeniable responsibility" to portray gender equitably, and calls for them to "become their first and best critics" of their portrayals of gender (p. 143). However, she notes that demanding gender equity is difficult, because both the creators and choosers of children's books are immersed in a culture which blinds them to themes supporting inequality, and many teachers, authors, and illustrators are simply unaware. My approach would facilitate critical thinking by these and other adults in their selections of new books and provide guidelines by which to make those decisions. Overall, children's books should

authentically depict [children's] lives and their history; build self-respect and encourage the development of positive values; make children aware of their strength and leave them with a sense of hope and direction; teach them the skills necessary for the maintenance of health and for economic survival; broaden their knowledge of the world, past and present, and offer some insight into the future (Greenfield, 1985, p. 21).

Accessibility, motivational quality, and balance will be important factors in writing a mass-market guidebook. In order to remain accessible to the reading public,

the writing style and tone should be informal and colloquial, rather than formal and academic, although footnotes and an annotated bibliography would provide further information for those who are interested. Such a book should be motivational, as well as informative; it should inspire readers to carefully scrutinize books as well as be an instructional manual of analyzing them. Because people may be motivated to peruse this guide by their interest in children's literature, rather than an interest in social justice or feminist analysis, it must be simultaneously useful to aware adults and non-threatening and non-condescending to non-aware adults.

The first part of the guide would be a brief explanation of systems and why analyzing children's books in these terms is important. This would be tricky to write because of the wide range of the intended audience, and would have to be brief because the explanation that oppression exists is the subject of entire books. Then it would go into a colloquial summary of the inequities and stereotypes that tend to be present in children's books. The main body of the book would be a list of criteria that can be used to analyze books. Based on my analysis of this sample, I would alert readers to the general overrepresentation of dominant members in all categories, white supremacy, the stereotypic portrayal of femininity, and males' reckless disregard for others, while pointing out the potential to queer books and the presence of the refreshing depiction of gender nonconformity in *Guess How Much I Love You*.

Other general feminist criteria by which to evaluate children's books would be included, much of which informed my own research, even if these criteria are not identified as feminist. Generally, books should honestly portray the complexity of individuals' lived realities, while at the same time they should not perpetuate

stereotypes, transmit ideologies of domination, or deny the existence of oppression.

Mikkelsen (1998) argues that children's books about nonwhite cultures should present those cultures fully authentically, whether written and illustrated by whites or nonwhites. Altieri (2006) notes that disability should not be the sole focus of a story; the plot should be interesting and the fact that a character is disabled should be revealed matter-of-factly. BIRTHA (1985) points out that a book which is identifiably inappropriate to be presented to a Black child is not appropriate for *any* children, that authority figures should not be all white (or male or members of other dominant groups), and that illustrations should be realistic. Not all characters should be beautiful, stereotyped images should not be included, and people of color should not simply be shaded-in whites (BIRTHA, 1985). Reese (2001) emphasizes that works of historical fiction should include many accurate details of clothing, customs, spirituality, lifestyle and mindset; particularly, Reese cautions against depictions of Native people (in a historical setting) thinking and/or behaving in ways identical to modern people and/or whites. Reese also lists various authentic characteristics common to the diverse groups of Native American women, many of which counter common stereotypes. The Council on Interracial Books for Children (1977) specifies that books should accurately reflect cultures and experiences, transcend stereotypes, accurately depict historical events, avoid model minority ideology, reflect the changing status of women, and pictorially depict the actual diversity of the group under consideration (in this case, Asian Americans). The Children's Literature Board (1977) guidelines for evaluating books about Blacks are very similar, adding that books should portray historical events from the perspective of the subordinate group, portray Blacks as individuals rather than as homogeneous group

members, be free of patronization, depict Blacks in subordinate roles to whites only for legitimate reasons, and not indicate that Blacks are doing well because of white goodwill. Ultimately, Black children - members of all oppressed groups - should be portrayed as individuals with fully formed unique identities, of which their being Black - or female or disabled or old, and so on - is a positive aspect (Thompson and Woodard, 1985).

Nodelman (2002) suggests reversing the protagonist's gender in order to see more clearly how the original gender is portrayed, a strategy which can also be a useful method to reveal portrayals of race, class, looks, ability, and sexual identity. Bracken and Wigutoff's (1979) criteria by which they recommend nonsexist books remain useful nearly three decades later. The depiction of female characters as active agents, male characters expressing emotions, and a well-rounded picture of children's realities indicate that a book is nonsexist (Bracken & Wigutoff, 1979). The Feminists on Children's Media (1971) prefer books in which "girl readers [are] encouraged to develop physical confidence and strength without the need to fear any corresponding loss of 'femininity' ... [and] the elimination of all those tiresome references to 'tomboys'" (p. 250). Further, books should "[g]ive a girl all the possible options you give a boy for her future life choices, all his freedom to inquire and explore and achieve" (p. 251). More recently, Clark et al. (1999) point out the importance of positive portrayals of nurturing males, multiple family structures, non-Western cultures, and cooperation. Simply eliminating feminine stereotypes results in an ideal of personhood that is inescapably masculine, and leaves women no option other than to emulate men. Diekman and Murnen (2004) add that, to avoid lending importance and validity to

gendered categories, there should not be a strict demarcation between girls and boys as playmates, or girls' and boys' artifacts or characteristics.

Upon further contemplation, however, several questions remain. Because I looked specifically for problems, I found them. Have I maintained a too-pessimistic perspective when evaluating my sample, and if so, what are the potential consequences? Is this the appropriate approach? If I had begun instead with the premise that there are redemptive qualities in children's books, would my analysis have painted a more positive picture? For example, what would I have found if I had looked for depictions of women's resistance to oppression? I would have emphasized the fact that the female pirates were depicted as resisting oppression, rather than emphasizing the fact that their non-traditional depiction remained within the bounds of their oppression. I would have emphasized the depiction of Sally in *Cars* as a lawyer, rather than emphasizing the fact that her profession was minimally represented.

My analysis of the two pirate books may have been different if I had considered them as works of historical fiction. I analyzed them by the same criteria that I evaluated all the others, disregarding their potential historical factuality. Evaluating them in the context of historical fiction may well have led me to reach different conclusions.

Although I engaged in subversive interpretations of these books in one sense, queering, I failed to attempt to engage in subversive readings in other areas. In my coding process, is my whiteness evident in the fact that I chose to code anthropomorphized animal and car characters for race and to designate as white those whose race is not specified as nonwhite? Perhaps both white and nonwhite children see themselves reflected in characters such as the Cat in the Hat and Little Nutbrown Hare;

certainly, my coding of such characters as dominant culture members denies that possibility.

In this thesis, I have summarized my theoretical perspective as a feminist, discussed my own social location, and addressed the question of potential research bias. I discussed picture books as agents of ideology controlled by adults, demonstrated the importance of literature on children's development, gave a general overview of guides to evaluating children's literature, and presented evidence that literature can be used to teach egalitarian values to children. I summarized problematic themes in children's literature which have been identified by previous researchers, discussed research revealing sexism, ageism, racism, ableism, and classism specifically in picture books, and identified the situation of my research within the larger body of literature. I described my sample, quantitative coding criteria, and qualitative research method and presented my findings. Analysis of my sample revealed fundamental overrepresentation of dominant group members, three major emergent themes, and the potential queering of several books. My findings are intentionally applicable to the writing of a mass-market guide to children's literature, and a variety of guidelines to choosing non-problematic books for children have been presented. Finally, I have problematized my own work by presenting and discussing several questions.

APPENDICES

Top ten best-selling children's picture books of 2006 (Source: Publishers' Weekly)

Goodnight Moon (board book). Margaret Wise Brown, illus. by Clement Hurd. HarperFestival, 1991

Pirateology. Dugald A. Steer. Candlewick

Cars. Ben Smiley. Golden

Green Eggs and Ham. Dr. Seuss. Random, 1960

Panda Bear, Panda Bear, What Do You See? (board book). Bill Martin Jr., illus. by Eric Carle. Holt

Pirates. John Matthews. Atheneum

Guess How Much I Love You (board book). Sam McBratney, illus. by Anita Jeram. Candlewick, 1996

The Poky Little Puppy. Janette Sebring Lowrey. Golden, 2001

Oh, the Places You'll Go! Dr. Seuss. Random, 1990

The Very Hungry Caterpillar (board book). Eric Carle. Philomel, 1994

Research questions

1. What is the book about? (Brief summary.)
2. What gender/race/class/ability status/sexual identity/age are characters? Main characters are those around whom the plot moves, who the book is about, and/or the characters by whom or from whose perspective the story is told (especially if their names appear in the title). Supporting characters are those with whom the main character comes into contact (who are necessary for the story), incidental characters are incidental to the plot, and background characters are those who appear briefly, namelessly, and/or in the background of the main story. These definitions are held constant throughout the coding and analysis process.
3. Who is shown in control of the situation/s?
4. When, if at all, does control of the situation shift, and from whom to whom?
5. Who is shown with power to act, decide, change, define?
6. What type of activities are being done by people of which apparent gender/race/class/ability status/sexual identity/age?
7. Who is shown doing reproductive work?
8. Who does “productive” work?
9. Who does care work? Who does emotional work on behalf of others?
10. Whose thoughts, feelings, attitudes, activities are more important/more valued?
11. What/whose behavior is considered to be deviant? According to whom?
12. Does punishment or negative consequences reflect gender/race/class/ability status/sexual identity/age stereotypes?
13. Do the activities of girl characters teach and/or reinforce femininity or subordination, and to what extent?
14. Do the activities of boy characters teach and/or reinforce masculinity or domination, and to what extent?
15. Do characters explicitly express attitudes or opinions about gender/race/class/ability status/sexual identity/age? Is there evidence of implicit attitudes or opinions about gender/race/class/ability status/sexual identity/age? To what extent is gender flexible? For whom? To what extent?

16. What is the result/reaction of other characters to gender nonconformity? To gender deviance?
17. What family structures are normalized?
18. What family structures are invisible or marginalized?
19. What/who is/are trivialized?
20. Who/what is Othered? (As in Fine, 1998)
21. What would be different about this book/story/character if the gender/race/class/ability status/sexual identity/age of a character or characters was switched? (As in Nodelman, 2002)
22. “If the authors include issues of race or ethnicity, do they use whiteness as the norm and place the burden of difference on other characters? Do the authors reveal the characters’ whiteness overtly, or do they give the reader clues, or do they merely encourage the assumption of whiteness? What is the role whiteness plays in the story?” (Fondrie, 2004, p. 16-17).
23. “How do white characters benefit from their whiteness in the story? Do they embody the power, status, and privilege that so often accompany whiteness? How do those protagonists act and speak, particularly in relation to other characters who do not possess that power and privilege?” (Fondrie, 2004, p. 17).

Percentages of all characters by category and gender

	male characters (humans and anthropomorph ized animals)	female characters (humans and anthropomorphi zed animals)	unspecified gender human characters	unspecified gender non- anthropomorp hized animals
main, supporting, and incidental characters (142 total)	85 (60%)	24 (17%)	6 (4%)	27 (19%)
main characters (31 total)	19 (61.3%)	2 (6.5%)	0	10 (32.2%)
supporting characters (15 total)	9 (60%)	6 (40%)	0	0
incidental characters (96 total)	57 (59.3%)	16 (16.6%)	0	23 (23.9%)
background characters (158 total)	45 (28.5%)	2 (1.2%)	0	111 (70.2%)
all characters (300 total)	130 (43.3%)	26 (8.6%)	6 (.02%)	138 (46%)

Percentages of gender-specific characters by category and gender

percentages of gender-specific characters	male characters (humans and anthropomorphized animals)	female characters (humans and anthropomorphized animals)
main, supporting, and incidental characters (109 total)	85 (78%)	24 (22%)
main characters (21 total)	19 (90.5%)	2 (9.5%)
supporting characters (15 total)	9 (60%)	6 (40%)
incidental characters (73 total)	57 (78%)	16 (22%)
background characters (47 total)	45 (95.7%)	2 (4.3%)

all characters (156 total)	130 (83.3%)	26 (16.7%)
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Percentages of race-specific characters by race and gender

percentages of race-specific characters - 176 total	male	female	gender not specified
white - 159 (90.3%)	131 (74%)	25 (14%)	3 (1.7%)
nonwhite - 17 (9.7%)	14 (8%)	1 (.5%)	2 (1.1%)

End notes

1. Unless otherwise specified, references to children's books and studies of children's books are of books and studies published in the United States. I regret the ethnocentricity which this implies, but since the bulk of my sources are from the U.S., I decided that to specify "U.S." on all but the few non-U.S. sources would be overly cumbersome.
2. I first encountered this metaphor in Eric Stoller's writing.
3. After sufficient articles dealing primarily with gender were located, relevant electronic article databases were searched with the following criteria: ("picture books" or picturebooks) and ((race or racism) or (class or classism) or (ability or disability or ableism) or (looks or looksism) or (heterosexism or heteronormativity) or (age or ageism)). No articles were found which primarily - or even substantially - analyzed children's books on the basis of sexual identity or looks, and only a very few were found which considered class, ability, age, or race.
4. I used the hardback library editions in my analysis, except for one Golden book I purchased because it was unavailable in my local and university libraries and one board book (*Guess How Much I Love You?*) which I purchased because the board book edition is laid out differently from the regular version. I discovered at my local bookstore that the other three board books are unaltered replicas of the regular editions, so I used regular editions of those books for analysis.
5. I consulted a wildlife biologist, Randall Moore, to determine whether the animals depicted as animals in *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, *Panda Bear, Panda Bear, What Do You See?*, and *The Poky Little Puppy* were identifiably female or male. The water

buffalo is the only one which could not have been either sex. The other animals are either not sexually dimorphic in reality, or are depicted sufficiently stylistically as to make sex determination impossible (or both). My daughter, when asked if the animals in *Panda Bear, Panda Bear, What Do You See?* were female or male, designated some as female, some as male, and could not designate others. However, when asked a few minutes later to review the gender of each animal, she reversed her evaluation of several animals' gender.

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