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Diversity in Newbery Medal-Winning Titles: A Content Analysis

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Abstract: This paper shares results from a critical content analysis of Newbery-winning titles from 1922-2019 for representations of race/ethnicity, gender, and disability. Each title was coded for the inclusion and representation of race/ethnicity, gender, and disability at both the book and main character levels. Lenses of critical race, gender schema, and critical disability theories were used to classify the ways race/ethnicity, gender, and ability of diverse populations are portrayed and represented in Newbery-winning titles. Results were then compared to U.S. Census and National Center for Education Statistics data about today's public-school population. Representations of diversity in Newbery-winning titles are not confluent with the race/ethnicity, gender, and disability of children in U.S. schools. Given the prominence of Newbery-winning literature in elementary schools, children are likely to come across these unrepresentative characters.

Keywords: children's & young adult literature; disability; diversity; reading & literature instruction

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Introduction[1]

Diverse, positive role models for race, ethnicity, gender, and disability exist in both fiction and nonfiction characters, and are featured in the public media. These role models are powerful figures as they inspire and motivate today's children, allowing them to see the possibilities of success for all people. The authentic characterization of African T'Challa by Chadwick Boseman in Marvel's *Black Panther* and the entrepreneurial spirit of Marley Dias have been captured in children's books and blockbuster films (e.g., *Black Panther: The Battle for Wakanda*, Snider, 2018; *Marley Dias Gets It Done and So Can You,* Dias, 2018; *Warriors of Wakanda,* Berrios, 2018). Malala Yousafzai made headlines in her fight for the rights of girls and women in Pakistan (*I am Malala: How One Girl Stood Up for Education and Changed the World*, Yousafzai & McCormick, 2016; *Malala: My Story of Standing Up for Girls' Rights*, Robbins & Yousafzai, 2018). Auggie, a boy with a facial deformity who proved himself as being just as human and everyone else, won the hearts of audiences everywhere and championed the "Choose Kind" movement with *Wonder,* (Palacio, 2012).

Diverse characters and people assist children as they internalize and learn norms and values about the world in which they live through overt or covert messages. They function "as a major socializing agent. [They tell] students who and what their society and culture values, what kind of behaviors are acceptable and appropriate, and what it means to be a decent human being" (Bishop, 1990b, p. 561).

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Children's growth and self-awareness are significantly impacted by the books they read and interact with (Chaudhri & Teale, 2013), and reading and discussing a variety of books assists children in (1) developing a positive sense of self (Levin, 2007) and (2) critically examining their world and perspectives (Braden & Rodriguez, 2016; Thein et al., 2007).

Examining a set of highly-regarded and well-known award-winning texts, such as Newbery winners, provides insight into books that have a strong possibility of getting into the hands of children. This study employs content analysis to describe the human characters in the corpus of Newbery Medal-winning texts 1922-2019, examining depictions of diversity in terms of race/ethnicity, gender, and ableness.

Why Children Need to See Themselves in Books

Diverse literature gives children insight into their own culture and surroundings as well as insight into the cultures of others, potentially giving rise to discussions of diversity (Colby & Lyon, 2004). A well-known metaphor by Bishop (1990a) thinks of literature as mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors through which children can see themselves and others. Mirrors allow children to see reflections of themselves, windows provide a view into the worlds of others, and sliding glass doors allow a reader to traverse into the world of others. Sciurba (2014/2015) built upon this metaphor by bringing in an individual's identity, positing that individuals are multilayered, and that differing levels of empathy and

[1] We acknowledge that there is a gender spectrum and that myriad pronouns exist that we can use when referring to individuals in our writing. Throughout this article we use pronouns to refer to individuals that correspond with the pronouns used in the literature analyzed.

awareness impact a child's connection to a text. It is more than just seeing oneself in a text, but also connecting to a character or event through a common experience or sympathizing with a character different from oneself. Young et al. (2019) expanded on this idea by stating that literature that depicts equality in various cultures affects children's view of their worlds.

Children's books are powerful tools for helping children understand discrimination at an early age (Banks, 2019), including discrimination on the basis of gender, religion, and disability. Hidden messages in books, specifically about power dynamics and who/what is valued in a society, whether intentional or not, also play a role in a child's identity development, as these messages can be internalized and affect a child's sense of self (Botelho & Rudman, 2009; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). The stories that adults share with children can affect their conceptualization of who they are and where they fit into their world (e.g. Al-Hazza & Bucher, 2008; Landt, 2011). Children's literature "allow[s] all students to understand their uniqueness, to understand the complexities of ethnicity and culture, and to take pride in who they are as people as well as learn to respect other cultural groups" (Banks, 1989, p. 6).

The Current State of Children's Publishing

Since Larrick's (1965) study *The All-White World of Children's Books*—that addressed the considerable lack of representation of characters of color, specifically African American characters, and the stereotypical portrayals of those included—the dearth of diversity in children's books has garnered much attention. Scholars have analyzed and problematized the lack of diverse representation in children's books (e.g., Bishop, 1982; Harris, 1997; Rollins, 1967) looking specifically at ethnicity (e.g., Naidoo, 2008), gender (e.g., Houdyshell & Martin, 2010), and disability (e.g., Leininger et al., 2010)—all confirming a continued lack of diversity in children's books.

In 2015, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) released the position statement "Resolution on the Need for Diverse Children's and Young Adult Books," acknowledging that today's children's books do not align with the increasing diversity in the United States. Proof can be found in the Cooperative Children's Book Center's (CCBC) annual statistics about children's books published by and/or about people of color. Due to the fact that "White characters are not—and never have been—lacking in books for humans and teens," the CCBC does not distinguish White human characters from other anthropomorphized animal characters and inanimate objects (CCBC, 2020b). Their most recent data show that across 4,029 books published in the U.S. in 2019, that include both human and non-human characters, only 26.6% contained racially/ethnically diverse themes, topics, and/or human main or principal secondary characters (CCBC, 2020a). Recently, renewed attention has been paid to this lack of diversity in the publishing world. As a response to an all-White, all-male panel of children's book authors at the 2014 BookCon convention, the hashtag #WeNeedDiverseBooks trended, leading to the non-profit organization We Need Diverse Books (WNDB). WNDB advocates for "essential changes in the publishing industry to produce and promote literature that reflects and honors the lives of all young people" (WNDB, 2020).

In 2019, the American Library Association (ALA) included three well-established awards into their Youth Media Awards (YMA) ceremony. Now, in addition to the Coretta Scott King Award for books by and about African Americans, the Pura Belpré Award for Latinx authors and illustrators, and the Schneider Family Book Award for representations of the disability experience, the YMA ceremony also announces the Asian/Pacific American Award for

Literature designed to "honor and recognize individual work about Asian/Pacific Americans and their heritage"; the Sydney Taylor Book Award to "recognize books that authentically portray the Jewish experience"; and the American Indian Youth Literature Award to "identify and honor the very best writing and illustrations by and about American Indians" (Association for Library Services to Children [ALSC], 2019]). Announcing these awards at the YMA announcements provides greater attention to awards for diverse populations and shows a dedication to recognizing the work of diverse authors and illustrators.

The Influence of Newbery Medal Books

The John Newbery Medal is awarded annually by the ALA to "the author of the most distinguished contribution to American literature for children" published in the preceding year (ALSC, n.d.). The purpose of the award is:

> To encourage original creative work in the field of books for children. To emphasize to the public that contributions to the literature for children deserve similar recognition to poetry, plays, or novels. To give those librarians, who make it their life work to serve children's reading interests, an opportunity to encourage good writing in this field. (ALSC, n.d., para. 3)

Since its inception, almost a century of titles have been awarded the medal along with yearly honor books, and these books have largely become a part of the children's literature canon (Kidd, 2007).

There are three main criteria for the Newbery award: (1a) literary quality as determined by "interpretation of the theme or concept; presentation of information including accuracy, clarity, and organization; development of a plot; delineation of characters; delineation of a setting; appropriateness of style"; (1b) "excellence of presentation for a child audience"; (2)

"a contribution to American literature . . . [decided] primarily on the text . . . [although] [o]ther components of a book, such as illustrations, overall design of the book, etc., may be considered when they make the book less effective"; and (3) "the book must be a self-contained entity" (ALSC, n.d.). Note that the award is not based on popularity but rather on perceived literary merit, and although considerations of representations of diversity are a natural component of book evaluation in terms of accuracy and authenticity, they are not determined to be criteria of the award.

Teachers and librarians often rely on book awards to select quality literature. As a result, award-winning books are often included in the curriculum and in school and classroom libraries, thereby ensuring likely access to and engagement with these texts (Kidd, 2007; Yokota, 2011).

The Newbery Medal's Impact on the Consumer Market

Newbery Medal winners rarely go out of print, "ensuring a permanent place on a publisher's backlist" (Clark, 2003, p. 74). Since its inception, only one book is currently out of print, *Daniel Boone* by James Daugherty (1939), due to extreme racism and perpetuation of stereotypes. These books are readily available and frequently bought; "the distinction of winning the awards helps to keep books in print, insuring cumulative sales over a longer period" (Maughan, 2011, para. 2). According to Anita Silvey, "[n]o other award has the economic significance of the Newbery and Caldecott" (Maughan, 2011, para. 2) leading to an instant increase of book sales (Cockcroft, 2018).

The Newbery Medal as a Purposive Sample

Scholars of children's literature analyze Newbery Medal- and Honor-winning texts due to their prevalence in curricula and classrooms. Previous

content analyses have been done on subsets of Newbery titles with targeted foci. These studies tended to focus on specific, defining constructs such as race/ethnicity, gender, and disability. Additionally, many studies of constructs within the Newbery Medal are student studies, such as master's theses and dissertations, and such studies rarely reach an audience outside their academic context.

Studies that examined race/ethnicity have tended to look at portrayal of non-White characters, often focusing on their role in the book (e.g., Gillespie et al., 1994), on stereotypical portrayals (e.g., Wilkin, 2009), or on rate of visibility (e.g., Clark, 2007; Miller, 1998). General findings included that there is a lack of diverse characters, although the visibility has changed during different time periods; and that analyses of portrayals have been based on contemporary, cultural realities.

The majority of studies analyzing a corpus of Newbery-winning books has focused on examining the books for gender representation. Many have relied on frequency counts, finding a predominance of male main characters through the years of the award. However, female main characters have either grown in number or shared the spotlight with male main characters in ensemble casts (e.g. Clark, 2007; Powell et al., 1998). Studies have also examined traditional versus nontraditional gender roles (e.g. Groce, 2010; Houdyshell & Martin, 2010), finding that portrayals of both male and female main characters have increased in number of nontraditional depictions, although traditional roles still remain prevalent.

Leininger, Dyches, and Prater are known for research on disability representation in children's literature, and in 2010 published a study focused on Newbery books from 1975-2009 (Leininger et al, 2010). This study was supplemented by a related thesis by one of their students examining disability portrayal in books

from 1922-1974, thereby covering much of the span of Newbery winner and honor books. These studies found that many characters with disabilities were portrayed positively across time, although there was a significant lack of such characters represented.

Limited foci in these studies allow for deeper analysis; they do not provide a large-scale understanding of the award across time and/or multiple constructs. What makes this study unique is that it examines the entirety of Newbery Medal-winning titles from the Medal's inception to 2019 for representations of race/ethnicity, gender, and disability. (Henceforth the term Newbery-winning books refers only to Medal winners and not Honor books.)

Theoretical Framework

The present study provides an overview of the data, analysis, and findings from a larger project that leveraged critical theories to frame the authors' analysis of the entire Newbery Medal-winning corpus. In the larger project, Critical Race Theory (CRT), Gender Schema Theory (GST), and Critical Disability Theory (CDT) are used to problematize the ways in which diverse populations, including race/ethnicity, gender, and disability, are portrayed and represented in Newbery-winning titles. These representations are characters children are likely to see in books, and consequently, characters that could impact their identity development. This article presents a broad view of the findings.

Critical theories such as CRT, GST, and CDT posit that individuals learn their roles and values in society through unwritten social rules and social norms (McLeod, 2008) and that individuals are socialized to internalize thoughts and behaviors of themselves and others in their worlds. CRT problematizes ways racism is inherent and learned, GST problematizes ways gender roles and norms are developed, and CDT problematizes ways depictions of individuals with

disabilities influence perceptions of their place and role in society.

CRT examines implicit and explicit bias in society and states that racism must be acknowledged. Delgado and Stefanic (2001) outline five tenets of CRT that posit that (a) racism is common and prevalent in society; (b) racism is difficult to address due to its being embedded in daily life; (c) the concept of race is a product of society and social thought; (d) racialization is different depending on the needs of the dominant society; and (e) counter-narratives are critical to give people of a color a voice.

An additional component of CRT is interest convergence theory (Bell, 1992), which asserts that equality among and between people, specifically Black people, can only be reached when the interests of BIPOC align with, or converge with, those of White people. Inequitable education, including access to racially and ethnically diverse literature, ensures White social advantage (Milner et al., 2013; Rector-Aranda, 2016; Souto-Manning et al., 2019). When educators', scholars', and publishers' interests privilege the publication and inclusion of diverse literature, thereby allowing all children the opportunity to see themselves and make connections to the books they read, greater equality can be attained.

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Similar to CRT, GST is a cognitive theory that proposes that children learn gender roles from their culture by both human interactions and interactions with different forms of media such as books, television, movies, and games (Bem, 1983; Martin & Halverson, 1981; Trepanier-Street & Romatowski,

1999). GST suggests that a child's gender identity is affected by the variety of gender roles and expressions they see in society and the materials they come into contact with (Egan & Perry, 2001; Nielson et al., 2020). Butler (2004) expands upon this and calls for a disruption of the binary view of sex and gender, arguing that gender is a performative act that is reinforced by societal norms.

Following the same foundational tenets, CDT examines the ways disabilities and individuals with disabilities are portrayed, focusing on the social and cultural perspectives rather than medical or rehabilitative ones (Saunders, 2004) that work to problematize the beliefs and assumptions of ableism present in society (Hunt, 1966).

These three theories have previously been used in research on children's literature, because when children read books, they also read culture. Thus, they are socialized into learning the ways they fit into their wider society, since biases depicted in children's books can contribute to children's self-identity (Hamilton et al., 2006). Existing content analyses of literature, featured in subsequent paragraphs, have used these theories individually, analyzing a subset of books for depictions of race/ethnicity, gender, or disability.

Studies using CRT have examined character depictions and language in presenting characters of different races in order to point out assumptive portrayals (Brissett, 2019; Wiseman et al., 2019). Many studies that use CRT focus on a specific population, such as depictions of African Americans (e.g., Brooks & McNair, 2015; Wilkin, 2009), Latinx (e.g., Chappell

& Faltis, 2007; Rodriguez & Braden, 2018), Asians (e.g., Rodriguez & Kim, 2018), and American Indians[2] (e.g., Bickford & Knoechel, 2017).

The critical lens of GST has been used to analyze the depiction of gender roles in subsets of books and identify whether or not the books perpetuate stereotypes (Bem, 1983; Trepanier-Street & Romatowski, 1999). Studies of gender in children's literature often examine picture books (e.g., Allen et al., 1993; Crisp & Hiller, 2011; Kneeskern & Reeder, 2020) or investigate the influence that children's literature has on children's gender attitudes (e.g. Crisp et al., 2018; Gritter et al., 2017). The notion of "traditional gender roles" is changing in contemporary society, trending toward inclusion of LGBTQ+ and nonbinary constructions of gender. Recent scholarship has explored the queering of children's books for examples of heteronormativity and its impact on identity development (DePalma, 2016; Hermann-Wilmarth & Ryan, 2016), as well as studies that examine representations of LGBTQ+ characters (Crawley, 2017; Lester, 2014).

Using tenets of CDT when analyzing literature can assist in identifying hidden biases or ideological representations that perpetuate the assumption that individuals with physical, emotional, or cognitive disabilities cannot be a part of general, mainstream activities. Research has used CDT to examine portrayals of characters with disabilities and whether they are appropriately, accurately, and positively depicted (Grow et al., 2019; Leininger et al., 2010).

Beach et al. (2009) state that, "content analysis is a flexible research method for analyzing texts and describing and interpreting the written artifacts of a society" (p. 129). They discuss how undertaking a content analysis permits the addition of specific theoretical perspectives and lenses to a quantitative content analysis. This approach allows for critical theories to be combined with quantitative analyses to foster critical thought. Willis (2008) asserts that not all tenets of a critical theory need to be used for every analysis, but rather that the analysis fit a study's purpose. This article is rooted in the above critical theories but is designed to describe the field of the Newbery-winning titles on a large scale. Descriptive content analysis allows for establishing an overview, or baseline, of a set of data. Describing the corpus is a necessary prerequisite that must be met before conclusions from a critical perspective can be drawn. Adding a critical lens allows for a more nuanced discussion of the data. This article is designed to provide a picture of representations of diversity in the corpus of Newbery-winning books.

Research Questions

This study examined the representations of diversity in Newbery-winning titles from 1922-2019. It focused on the following guiding questions:

1. What diverse populations are represented within the corpus of Newbery-winning titles, and with what prevalence are they portrayed across categories of race/ethnicity, gender, and disability?
2. What diverse populations are represented within the main characters encountered in Newbery-winning titles, and with what prevalence are they portrayed across categories of race/ethnicity, gender, and disability?

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[2] The terms American Indian and Middle Eastern are used in this article. The American Indian Youth Literature Award applies the term American Indians to honor and celebrate literature by Native Americans and Indigenous North American peoples. The term Middle Eastern was selected over alternatives (e.g., Western Asian) as it is the titular term used for the Middle East Book Award.

Methodology

This study is a descriptive content analysis of Newbery-winning books. Krippendorf (2004) sees content analysis as "*a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from the text to the contexts of their uses*" (p. 18; emphasis in original). Our coding process was reader-response-oriented (Rosenblatt, 1978) and recognized that texts have multiple interpretations. The intention in this particular analysis of the larger data set was to describe the presence and prevalence of literary elements that signaled race/ethnicity, gender, and disability. To accomplish this goal, we used systematic content analysis procedures as described by Cohen et al. (2007), with an *a priori* coding system (Weber, 1990).

The *a priori* system was developed and adapted from previously used instruments in content analyses. This system allowed for coding variables such as religion, social class, sexual orientation, setting of story (i.e., time and place), genre, text complexity, the author's cultural identity and sexual orientation—variables that are not discussed in the present study—in addition to variables centered on representations of race/ethnicity, gender, and disability—variables that are discussed in this study. The decision to present the analysis and findings related to race/ethnicity, gender, and disability in lieu of the other variables emanates from (a) the prominence of examples within the data for race/ethnicity, gender, and disability compared to the limited breadth and depth of examples for the other variable codes, and (b) the obvious connections from the extant literature to the analysis around these three variables—race/ethnicity, gender, and disability. In other words, the coding framework described below offered the richest set of data to discuss and has been previously used with large data sets in past content analyses examining representations of diversity in picture

2018) books (Koss, 2015) and Caldecott winners (Koss et al., 2018).

A Priori Variables Coded

A list of the *a priori* variables and coding framework used in the present study appear below.

Race/Ethnicity

The guidelines for race and ethnicity that are applied in the U.S. Census were employed as part of the *a priori* coding scheme employed in this study (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). Race is defined as a person's self-identification with one or more social groups (asterisked in Table 1) whereas ethnicity determines whether an individual is of Latinx origin. "Middle Eastern" is not on the 2020 U.S. Census race classification scheme; all peoples identifying as Middle Eastern would either self-identify as "White" or as "Some other race." Given the large number of children of Middle Eastern descent in U.S. schools today (see, e.g., Parvini & Simani, 2019), this data set coded specifically for this group.

Terminology was chosen to reflect the terms used by the major children's book award committees (American Indian Library Association, 2010; Asian Pacific American Library Association, 2010; Black Caucus of the American Library Association, 2003; REFORMA, n.d.).

Gender

Although acknowledging that coding for gender with a binary, male/female, coding scheme is theoretically problematic and not entirely inclusive or reflective of contemporary trends in gender studies, the corpus of data reflected the binary scheme with no exceptions as far as the human main characters were concerned. Gender pronouns, gender-specific language, and/or visible gender presented in images, when applicable, provided the source information upon which gender

Table 1

Race/Ethnicity Values*

Values	Description
White*	People with origins from Europe or North Africa. White was used to refer to any individual not identified as Black, American Indian, Asian, Latinx, Middle Eastern, or Multiracial. Typically, the term White refers to those of European descent.
Black*	People with origin from Africa. Includes people identifying as African American. Black includes all peoples who identify as racially and ethnically Black (which might include peoples who identify as African, African American, Caribbean, West Indian, and from other areas).
Latinx	People (from any race) of Hispanic or Latin origin. Latinx includes people from Latin America, North America, the Caribbean, and other countries who self-identify as having Latinx heritage.
American Indian or Alaska Native*	People of First Nation and Indigenous origins in North, South, and Central Americas.
Asian*	People inhabiting the continent of Asia inclusive of the Far East, Southeast Asia, and India, as well as U.S.-residing Asian-Americans. Asian includes Asian, Asian Pacific, Asian American, and all other people who identify as of Asian heritage.
Island Born*	People indigenous to Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or the Pacific Islands.
Middle Eastern	People of Southwest Asian, Middle Eastern, or North African countries, or those U.S.-residing peoples from these geographic regions who identify as belonging to this group. Middle Eastern includes people from Western Asia and parts of Northern Africa and Southeastern Europe.
Multiple	Books narrated in equal proportion from multiple points of view with different Races/Ethnicities. Only applicable at the Book level.
Multiracial*	People identifying as having two or more races of origin.
Unknown	Books and characters with very specific, yet undetermined, cultural or linguistic patterns were classified as Unknown.

was determined. These guidelines were based on previous studies (e.g. Crabb & Bielawski, 1994; Weitzman et al., 1972) that identified all characters of any type—human, animal, toy, magical creature, insect—if they were clearly identifiable in text or image. If a character's gender was not clearly presented by one of the above factors, the character was coded as neutral even though such parameters are limiting and potentially problematic, as gender is not solely a binary construction.

Disability

Unless explicitly specified by an in-text description or label, or an adaptive device presented in an illustration, when applicable, a character was presumed to be able-bodied. The U.S. Department of Education's Individuals with Disabilities Education Act regulations guided the *a priori* coding framework for the following analyses. For ease of discussion,

Table 2

Ability

Values	Description
Physical	People with any physical impairment that hindered their mobility, vision, hearing, speech (e.g., cleft palate), or physical health (e.g., diabetes, heart conditions). This included glasses and crutches. Temporary physical impairment was included in the coding.
Social-Emotional	People with any social or emotional disorder including anxiety, phobias, depressive disorders, or bipolar disorder.
Cognitive	People with any cognitive impairment, including learning disabilities, reading difficulties, expressive or receptive language, traumatic brain injury, Alzheimer's, and others.
Multiple Disabilities	Any character who contained more than one of the following: physical, social-emotional, and/or cognitive disabilities.

disability was divided into three main domains of development: physical, social-emotional, and cognitive. Physical included any physical impairment, social-emotional included any social or emotional disorder, and cognitive included all learning disabilities. If a character wore glasses, they were coded as having a physical disability. Coding allowed for multiple disabilities to be captured at the book and main character levels of analysis. When an identified disability explicitly affected multiple domains of development, and the impact was detailed in the text, the "multiple disabilities" value was coded, but we also captured the specific physical, social-emotional, or cognitive disability in the data set. The research team qualitatively documented the language observed in the Newbery-winning titles. Table 2 presents the descriptive codes employed for disability.

Sample and Inter-rater Agreement

All Newbery winners from the inception of the award in 1922 through 2019 were included in this study for a total of 98 books. ALSC (n.d.) publishes a list of all Newbery-winning titles.

Three researchers read and coded the 98 titles in this study—86% of the titles were coded by the first author; 18% by the second author; and 19% by the research assistant. Inter-rater agreement was established in dyads first, with inter-rater agreement ranging from 91% to 98% among all codes and across all coders. Any disagreements were resolved to consensus through discussion. All three researchers coded seven percent of the titles, with 94% agreement across the three coders and 85 variables.

The results were analyzed in SPSS Statistics (IBM, 2019) and in Excel (Microsoft, 2019). Once frequency counts were established for the full set of overall book and main character variables, the authors analyzed the data for patterns to describe the patterns observed with respect to the prevalence of race/ethnicity, gender, and disability in the corpus. Intersections of diversity were analyzed by using cross tabulations of the race/ethnicity data set with the gender or disability data sets.

Table 3
Primary Race/Ethnicity Coded in Overall Book

Race/Ethnicity	Frequency	% (of n=92 books coded)
White	63	68.5
Black	8	8.7
Latinx	4	4.3
Asian	8	8.7
American Indian	2	2.2
Island Born	2	2.2
Middle Eastern	2	2.2
Multiple	1	1.1
Unknown	2	2.2
Total	92	100

Results

Coding across the two levels of data (overall book and main characters) often did not maintain an n=98. When variables were not present in a particular text, they were omitted from the analysis at the book and main character levels. N-values for each analysis are reported in each section that follows.

We capped the number of main characters coded in our data set at four per title. Because one aspect of this analysis is concerned with race/ethnicity, books with no characters or non-human characters were omitted from analyses, yielding the following: 13 books did not contain human main characters, 62 books had one human main character, 15 had two human main characters, four books had three human main characters, and four books had four human main characters coded. We identified 120 human main characters across 85 Newbery winners.

Race/Ethnicity

We coded for race/ethnicity across a number of dimensions in the texts.

Book Overall

A book was considered as containing a primary race/ethnicity when the books' characters predominantly represented a specific racial or ethnic group. A secondary race/ethnicity was coded at the book level when characters of a racial or ethnic group different from the primary race/ethnicity appeared in the book, or when the main character traveled to a new or foreign place wherein they encountered another culture or race/ethnicity.

Primary Race/Ethnicity. At the book level, variables captured a primary race/ethnicity for 92 of the books in the set. Six books did not present a primary race/ethnicity, for example books with primarily animal characters such as *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH* (O'Brien, 1971) and *The One and Only Ivan* (Applegate, 2012). This variable is summarized in Table 3. White was the predominant race/ethnicity coded in the data set. In the case of *Hello, Universe* (Kelly, 2017), "Multiple" was applied to reflect that the story unfolded equitably from multiple points of view, with each character portraying a different ethnicity.

Secondary Race/Ethnicity. Forty-six books had both primary and secondary race/ethnicity coded. An additional 48 titles did not present any secondary race/ethnicity. Two books, *Joyful Noise: Poems for Two Voices* (Fleischman, 1988) and *Miss Hickory* (Bailey, 1946), had neither a primary nor a secondary race/ethnicity. In other words, 49 percent of Newbery-winning texts portray a single race/ethnicity, and approximately 46 percent of the Newbery-winning texts present multiple races/ethnicities. Thirty-seven books were coded with White as the primary race/ethnicity with no secondary race/ethnicity identified, indicating that White appears as the default race/ethnicity in this sample of U.S. children's literature.

To further illustrate the ways in which White is the default race/ethnicity, we analyzed 28 books in which (a) White was the primary race/ethnicity, and (b) one or more non-White races/ethnicities functioned as secondary. Several Newbery-winning titles are worth identifying by name because the titles represent exceptions to the norms observed in the data for race/ethnicity. Table 4 presents the titles in which a non-White race/ethnicity was coded as secondary at the book level. A value of 1 appearing in Table 4 indicates a code for secondary race/ethnicity. In *Waterless Mountain* (Armer, 1931), for example, there were two secondary races/ethnicities coded: White and American Indian.

Table 5 presents a cross-tabulation of the primary and secondary races/ethnicities appearing within books containing a non-White secondary race/ethnicity. In each of these instances, the diversity was presented in a primarily White world. For example, eight titles included American Indians as secondary characters (e.g., *Caddie Woodlawn* [Brink, 1935], *Thimble Summer* [Enright, 1938]), and 20 titles included Black secondary characters (e.g., *The Voyages of Doctor Dolittle* [Lofting, 1922], *Holes* [Sachar, 1998]). As a more specific example, Merci, in *Merci Suárez Changes Gears* (Medina, 2018) is a Latina child whose family is the primary focus of the book. The story takes place in the United States within a neighborhood whose characters are portrayed as predominantly White. Within that neighborhood, Merci's family, her grandparents, and her aunt and cousins live at "Las Casitas," three small houses grouped closely together, in a small neighborhood within a neighborhood. Because of this segregation, Merci's brother Roli said they lived in "the Suárez Compound" (p. 18). There were a few additional non-White characters in the neighborhood schools, including the twins that are described as "Vietnamese" (p. 22).

Main Characters

Across the 85 titles coded for one or more main character, our results yield minimal diversity: 85 (70.8%) of the n=120 human main characters were White; 12 (10.0%) were Asian; 10 (8.3%) were Black; three were Latinx (2.5%); seven were Middle Eastern, American Indian, or Island Born (5.9%, combined). Three additional main characters had a race/ethnicity classified as "unknown" as was observed in *The Giver* (Lowry, 1993) and in *The Girl Who Drank the Moon* (Barnhill, 2016).

Of those main characters whose race/ethnicity was known and coded as other-than-White (n=32 characters, appearing across 28 titles), two lived in a predominantly White world: a South Asian in *The View from Saturday* (Konigsburg, 1996), and a biracial character, American Indian and White, in *Walk Two Moons* (Creech, 1994). With the exception of the two non-White characters appearing in *Hello, Universe* (Kelly, 2017) whose stories unfolded in a world filled with diversity, the remaining 28 non-White characters appeared in a primary race/ethnicity, and larger cultural context, that was their own (i.e., in books where most everyone else looks like they do).

Table 4

Secondary Diverse Race/Ethnicities Appearing in Overall Book

Title	White	Black	Latinx	Asian	American Indian	Island Born	Other
Voyages of Doctor Dolittle, The (1923)	1	1				1	
Smoky, the Cowhorse (1926)		1	1				
Hitty, Her First Hundred Years (1929)		1		1	1		
Waterless Mountain (1931)	1				1		
Invincible Louisa: The Story of the Author of Little Women (1933)	1	1					
Dobry (1934)				1			
Caddie Woodlawn (1935)					1		
Thimble Summer (1938)					1		
Daniel Boone (1939)		1			1		
Matchlock Gun, The (1941)		1			1		
Johnny Tremain (1943)	1	1					
Strawberry Hill (1945)		1					
Secret of the Andes (1953)	1						Biracial
Carry on, Mr. Bowditch (1955)		1	1				
Rifles for Watie (1957)		1			1	1	
Witch of Blackbird Pond, The (1958)		1			1		
Bronze Bow, The (1961)	1	1					
I, Juan de Pareja (1965)			1				
Slave Dancer, The (1973)		1					
Westing Game, The (1978)		1		1			
Gathering of Days: A New England Girl's Journal, 1830-1832, A (1979)		1					
Dicey's Song (1982)		1					
Lincoln: A Photobiography (1987)		1					
Maniac Magee (1990)		1					
View from Saturday, The (1996)				1			
Holes (1998)		1					
When You Reach Me (1999)		1					
Merci Suarez Changes Gears (2019)	1			1			
Total by Race/Ethnicity	7	20	3	5	8	2	1

Table 5

Cross-tabulation of Diverse Secondary Races/Ethnicities x Primary Race/Ethnicity

	Primary Race/Ethnicity						
	White	Black	Latinx	Asian	American Indian	Middle Eastern	Other
Secondary Races/Ethnicities							
Black	19	X				1	
Latinx	2	1	X				
Asian	4		1	X			
American Indian	7				1*		
Middle Eastern						X	
Other	3						X

*Note that American Indian is both primary and secondary due to two different American Indian groups within *Waterless Mountain.*

Gender

We next detail the specific codes we applied to the texts to account for their representation of gender.

Book Overall

Ninety-seven of the books had both a male and a female character (*Joyful Noise: Poems for Two Voices* [Fleischman, 1988] was the only title that did not demonstrate this depiction because there were no actual characters). Three books contained a character that we coded as neutral, non-human, and always in a book with male and female characters (e.g., the dog in *Call it Courage* [Sperry, 1949], the Brain in *A Wrinkle in Time* [L'Engle, 1962], and the dragons in *The Hero and the Crown* [McKinley, 1984]). Although

our coding allowed for non-binary representations of gender, no instances were identified.

The function of gender roles in the narrative and unfolding of the plot were noted at the book level as well. Powell et al., (1993) use the terms *traditional* and *progressive* to determine gender roles. Traditional females are defined as those who are the "primary caretaker of children and home, sensitive, comforting, dependent, physically weak," while traditional males are the "primary provider, physically strong, brave, adventurous, independent." Conversely, progressive females are "married women working outside the home, physically strong, brave, independent, in male dominated jobs," and progressive males are "caretakers of children and involved in duties at home, sensitive, working in

female dominated jobs" (p. 98). Of the 85 titles that contained human characters, sixty clearly presented traditional gender roles. In these titles, female characters were depicted in stereotypical jobs such as housekeeper, stay-at-home mother, secretary, and teacher, while men had a greater variety of occupations and were shown to have a greater variety of occupational options, such as businessman and/or owner, farmer, doctors, or politicians.

An additional seven (5.8%) titles did not present characters adhering to traditional gender roles. The following examples illustrate such divergence from stereotypical gendered norms. Mrs. Murry, the mother in *A Wrinkle in Time* (L'Engle, 1962), worked as a scientist. While Meg and Charles' father also worked in science, it was not common at the time for women to work, let alone to work in the STEM fields. Even after Mr. Murry went missing, his wife continued to work while raising the children.

In *The Giver* (Lowry, 1993), the jobs and tasks characters were given in the society were assigned based on the characters' aptitudes, rather than on their gender—in this text there were male night Nurturers simply because they possessed the ability to connect to others, and "lacked the interest or skills or insight for the more vital jobs of the daytime hours" (p. 8).

In *The Crossover* (Alexander, 2014), the mother worked while the father stayed home to raise Josh and Jordan. Here, even though the father used to play professional basketball and experienced Olympic success in the sport, he opted to stay home and care for the boys.

Another seven titles (5.8%) broke traditional gender roles because the narrative context deemed it necessary. For example, Princess Elionwy in *The High King* (Alexander, 1968) fought against the female constrictions placed upon her, demanded to fight for

her kingdom with the men, and "declined to exchange her warrior's rough garb for more befitting attire" (p. 124). Additionally, after his wife died, Jacob, the father in *Sarah Plain and Tall* (MacLachlan, 1985), ran the household and cared for his children. He solicited for a wife and mother, the title character, Sarah. A final example appears in *The Girl Who Drank the Moon* (Barnhill, 2016): the males served as the governing body of the Protectorate, yet the females actually kept order and were the only people who had access to the library, and therefore written wisdom and knowledge.

There were also eleven titles (9.2%) whose characters did not adhere to traditional gender roles but did so as a function of historical context. In such examples, the majority of female characters represent "*Little Women* Syndrome," in which the female main character is presented as spunky and often tomboyish, breaking gender norms for the historical time period. For example, the supporting characters in *Caddie Woodlawn* (Brink, 1935) tell Caddie it is time to stop running through the woods with her brother and act like a lady. Additionally, *Roller Skates* (Sawyer, 1936) presents a quick-tempered, stubborn, and feisty main character residing in New York in the 1890s who challenged what is expected from a young lady, Lucinda, who prefers to roller skate wildly through town.

Main Characters

Although the book level analysis showed that nearly all books have both male and female characters, in many of the books one gender is predominantly portrayed (e.g., *The Dark Frigate* [Hawes, 1923]), or the main characters' roles are held by more male or female characters. Of the 120 main characters appearing in the books, 70 are male (58.3%) and 50 are female (41.7%). Only seven female main characters appear in Newbery-winning texts before 1960. Six of these seven female main characters

appearing in early-published Newbery-winners break traditional gender roles. For example, the family in *Invincible Louisa: The Story of the Author of Little Women* (Meigs, 1933) primarily presents traditional gender roles. However, when they spend time living on a commune, the whole family pitches in. Men do traditional women's work and vice versa. Birdie in *Strawberry Hill* (Lenski, 1945) is the only early-appearing example of a female main character who adheres to traditional gender roles.

The remaining early-appearing female main characters break the stereotypical traditional gender roles, especially given the historical context in which each title is set. The context for *The Witch of Blackbird Pond* (Speare, 1958) is very traditional, full of Puritan values, but the female main character is very independent, free spirited, and does not fit in with her strict Puritan family. Several other early-published titles, such as *Miracles on Maple Hill* (Sorensen, 1956), present a female main character who wants to help with male's work, but who also tends house and takes care of kids while the men work and provide. The female main characters in *Caddie Woodlawn* (Brink, 1935), *Roller Skates* (Sawyer, 1936), and *Thimble Summer* (Enright, 1938) are all tomboys.

Female main characters tend to be spunky and resist traditional gender role stereotypes, yet few male main characters act in non-gender normative ways. Only two male main characters are addressed as breaking traditional gender roles: Jess in *Bridge to Terabithia* (Paterson, 1977), and Maniac in *Maniac Magee* (Spinelli, 1990). Jess is a male main character that has a close friendship with Leslie, which is a source of concern for Jess's parents as they are concerned that their son only plays with girls and worry "what would become of it" (p. 46). Maniac does housework and tends to children.

Disability

We next present the category of disability, with the understanding that the terminology included in these results reflects the language observed in the Newbery texts.

Book Overall

Of the 98 Newbery-winning books examined in this study, more than half, 45, did not explicitly describe any cognitive, physical, or social-emotional disability. Of the remaining 53 books, social-emotional disabilities were least represented at the book level (n=6). *The Bronze Bow* (Speare, 1961) includes one secondary character with agoraphobia, and *Dicey's Song* (Voight, 1982) also has a secondary character with reported depression. In addition, *Flora & Ulysses* (DiCamillo, 2013) has a character with "emotional trauma," and two additional titles, *Onion John* (Krumgold, 1959) and *Up a Road Slowly* (Hunt, 1966), have examples of unspecified "mental illness." Significantly, these are not examples found in any main character. *When You Reach Me* (Stead, 2009) also describes a mental illness, but this instance is connected to a main character appearing in the narrative.

Physical disability is the largest group represented (47 books, 48% of all Newbery-winning titles). At the book level of analysis, glasses account for 11 percent (n=11) of the physical disabilities identified, but a substantial number of characters who are, as the text in the titles analyzed described, "blind" (n=7), "mute" (n=3), "burned" (n=2), "lame" (n=4), "crippled" (n=5), "dwarf" (n=1), and deaf (n=2) are introduced among the pages of Newbery-winning books. These counts of exemplar physical disabilities include both main characters and those who were not coded in the analysis as main characters. Burned and lame were included as physical disabilities when the text suggests that those physical conditions result in the

need for accommodations for the condition. For example, Johnny from *Johnny Tremain* (Forbes, 1943) works as a blacksmith and severely burns his hand to a point at which it no longer functions physically enough for him to continue his work without assistance. In *Adam of the Road* (Gray, 1942), Adam is a young minstrel who is trying to find his dog. In doing so he witnesses a robbery and goes to the village to report the incident to the town bailiff. The village is deserted except for a few mothers, babies, and "lame folk" (p. 181). All that are able are required by law to bring in the harvest.

Table 6 presents the titles in which the exemplar physical disabilities referenced in the preceding paragraph were coded at the overall book level. As such, disabilities may not have been attributed to a main character. The column heads indicate the terms employed within the pages of the Newbery-winning titles.

A cognitive disability appeared in ten books overall; "slow," "mental illness," "retarded," or "mentally retarded" are among the terms used in text in these instances. Examples include many instances of secondary characters and several main characters that will be described in the section that follows. Examples of secondary characters with a cognitive disability emanate from *Dicey's Song* (Voight, 1982), *Julie of the Wolves* (George, 1972), *Up a Road Slowly* (Hunt, 1966), *The Summer of the Swans* (Byars, 1970), and *The Westing Game* (Raskin, 1978). In *The Summer of the Swans,* for example, Sarah, the main character, is discussing with Wanda, her sister, a conversation Wanda has in school about her brother, Charlie. Charlie has a cognitive disability resultant from a severe childhood illness. Sarah is upset that Wanda is talking about her brother in class and says, "What do you say? 'Let me tell you all about my retarded brother?—it's so interesting'?" (p. 13).

Main Characters

In the Newbery-winning texts, 17 (14%) of the 120 human main characters were identified as having any type of disability. Fourteen main characters are people with physical disabilities. One main character appears with a social-emotional disability and two main characters are identified as having cognitive disabilities: Virgil in *Hello Universe* (Kelly, 2017) and Miggery Sow in *The Tale of Despereaux* (DiCamillo, 2003), the only main character classified as having multiple disabilities, both cognitive and physical.

The corpus sampled here indicates that, when a main character does have a disability (n=17), they function as the hero in three titles, including Johnny from *Johnny Tremain* (Forbes, 1943). The laughing man/Marcus from *When You Reach Me* (Stead, 2009) is a person with a social-emotional disability, described as a "mental illness" (p. 115) resulting from too much traveling through time. Finally, Miggery Sow serves Princess Pea in *The Tale of Despereaux* (DiCamillo, 2003). Mig is half deaf and is described as "slow-witted," yet leverages her wit to help Despereaux save the princess from the villain, Roscuro.

Intersections of Race/Ethnicity, Gender, and Ability in Main Characters

Several additional trends emerged when we examined intersections of the *a priori* variables at the main character level of coding. The first trend appeared from our query examining race/ethnicity and ability. Looking across main characters depicted as having a disability, a larger portion of the non-White characters appear to be written as disabled compared to the portion of White main characters written as people with disabilities. Of the 85 White main characters, only 12 (14%) are presented as having a disability. In contrast, one of three (33%) of Latinx characters, three of 12 (25%) of Asian, and one

Table 6

Exemplars of Physical Disabilities Observed in Newbery-Winning Titles

Title	"Blind"	"Mute"	"Lame"	"Crippled"	"Dwarf"	"Burned"	"Deaf"
Trumpeter of Krakow, The (1928)	1						
Young Fu of the Upper Yangtze (1932)				1			
White Stag, The (1937)	1						
Adam of the Road (1942)			1				
Matchlock Gun, The (1942)				1			
Johnny Tremain (1943)				1		1	
Strawberry Hill (1945)				1			
King of the Wind (1948)		1					
Amos Fortune, Free Man (1950)			1				
Witch of Blackbird Pond, The (1958)			1				
Bronze Bow, The (1961)		1					1
Shadow of a Bull (1964)	1						
I, Juan de Pareja (1965)				1	1		
High King, The (1968)					1		
Slave Dancer, The (1973)		1					
Jacob Have I Loved (1980)			1				
Walk Two Moons (1994)	1						
Out of the Dust (1997)						1	
Year Down Yonder (2000)	1						
Good Masters! Sweet Ladies! Voices from a Medieval Village (2007)	1						
Flora & Ulysses: The Illuminated Adventures (2013)	1						
Hello, Universe (2017)							1
Totals	7	3	4	5	2	2	2

of two (50%) of Middle Eastern characters were coded as having a presented disability.

Examples of this phenomenon can be found in Agba, the "mute" stable boy from Morocco, from *King of the Wind* (Henry, 1948). Merci, a Latina character in *Merci Suárez Changes Gears* (Medina, 2018), wears glasses to help a lazy eye function, which qualifies her for being coded as having a disability. Virgil, a Filipino boy in *Hello, Universe* (Kelly, 2017), has a learning disability specific to math. Additional examples were found in May from *Kira-Kira* (Kadohata, 2004) and in Crane-man from *A Single Shard* (Park, 2001).

The second intersectional trend occurred when we compared main character race/ethnicity and gender. Fifty-four percent (n=46) of the sample identified as White are male and 46 percent (n=39) are female. We identified a comparable distribution of race/ethnicity in the American Indian subgroup (50% male, 50% female). The data yielded eight male (80%) and two female (20%) characters coded as Black. The Asian and Asian American subgroup of race/ethnicity also presented also more male (n=9, 75%) than female (n=3, 25%) characters. The only Island-Born main character is female. The two Middle Eastern characters are both male.

Intersections of the main character's gender and ability yielded the third trend. Although four books present some form of cognitive disability, two main characters have a single cognitive disability. Both characters are male, the laughing man/Marcus from *When You Reach Me* (Stead, 2009) and Virgil from *Hello, Universe* (Kelly, 2017). One additional female character, Miggery Sow in *The Tale of Despereaux* (DiCamillo, 2003), also has a cognitive disability, but this condition is comorbid with a physical disability. Physical disability is presented equally across male and female main character subgroups in the corpus.

Discussion

Larrick (1965) pointed out the dearth of African American characters in children's books, a finding confirmed by Bishop in 1982. The results of this study confirm that their findings are still correct. Despite increasing diversity in the United States, Newbery-winning books that feature diverse populations generally remain a rarity. Although it remains unclear whether or not children are exposed to the breadth of Newbery books from 1922-2019 equally, the depictions that are included across history merit closer examination. We use elements of Critical Race Theory, Gender Schema Theory, and Critical Disability Theory to explore the significance of the findings.

Newbery as Market Force/Interest Convergence Theory

A tenet of CRT is interest convergence theory, which details how the financial aspects of commercial publishing favor White audiences and creators (Bell, 1992). Children's books about White characters are more profitable than books about characters of color (Perez, 2014), and so such books are more frequently published. Market trends in children's book publishing also suggest that award-winning titles "are available in stores for a longer time, and get special attention and promotions" (Cockcroft, 2018). As such, Newbery-winning titles are a strong market force (Allen, 2020).

According to interest convergence theory, there should be an emphasis on the promotion and publication of non-White authors and stories about non-White children (e.g., #OWNVOICES; #WENEEDDIVERSEBOOKS). However, data from the CCBC (2019) demonstrate how non-White populations were not historically being published, and so there was little opportunity to examine such books for the Newbery Medal, or to put such books

into children's hands. Mabbott (2017) suggests, "CRT . . . challenges the white-normative power structure in our society" (p. 508), suggesting the need for greater attention to racial and ethnic diversity in the field of children's literature. The #WENEEDDIVERSEBOOKS movement has pushed this issue to the fore and marked progress is emerging. The analyses herein suggest there is more racial and ethnic diversity in titles awarded the Newbery Medal in the past five years, and future work will further unpack this trend. With validation, the trend will continue to grow and matters of diversity, equity, and inclusion may continue to impact the Newbery and other major awards, especially as consumers continue to seek out diversity in the books they purchase. If there are more diverse books eligible for awards, there is a greater likelihood the award committee may select a book with a racially/ethnically diverse character, differently-abled character, or character who does not adhere to stereotypical gender norms.

"When only seeing predominantly White characters as protagonists in the books children may encounter, they may subconsciously internalize that people of color are relegated to supporting roles in American society."

Populations of Children in U.S. Schools as Context for Discussion

Data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) are presented at the start of each subsequent section to facilitate discussion of the trends observed in the corpus of Newbery-winning literature.

Race/Ethnicity

Data from NCES indicate that in 2018 there were 50.4 million students enrolled in public PreK-12 institutions in the United States. The NCES (2019b) reports that White and Black populations decreased to 49 percent and 15 percent, respectively. In contrast, more Latinx and 26 Asian/Pacific Islander students were enrolled from 2010 to 2015. Some theorize (e.g., Chen, 2019) that White children will soon be the minority in U.S. schools.

Given the state of U.S. school populations and the results of this study's examination of race/ethnicity, it becomes increasingly vital to emphasize that all schools, teachers, and librarians critically examine the collections of books they are using for curriculum and instruction and/or recommending to and for children. After all, "Children have the right to read texts that mirror their experiences and languages, provide windows into the lives of others, and open doors into our diverse world" (International Literacy Association, 2019, n. p.). The Newbery-winning corpus does not offer racially/ethnically diverse children many opportunities to see mirrors of their experiences and languages—there are far more windows than mirrors available for non-White children. This study demonstrates that children who interact with multiple Newbery-winning books see mostly white faces. Through these encounters, the children receive the message that, according to scholars of CRT, it is better to be White.

In addition, that non-White characters presented in Newbery-winning titles were living and being in predominantly White settings is also an interesting finding. Although there are two characters who are non-White and who live in predominantly non-White fictional worlds, the remaining non-White characters' stories unfold in contexts that mirror their own ethnic experiences and who encounter little racial or ethnic diversity within their narratives.

Together, these two findings support Larrick's (1965) claim about "the all white world of children's literature" is abundant in the corpus of Newbery-winning texts. Although the Newbery-winning titles are not expressly identified by any state standards as required reading, this collection is present in an abundance of elementary and middle school classrooms (Kidd, 2007; Yokota, 2011). Through their encounters with multiple Newbery-winning titles, children predominantly observe White characters in fictional or historical worlds that are largely governed by White people that likely reinforce stereotypical White privilege (Clark, 2020). When only seeing predominantly White characters as protagonists in the books children may encounter, they may subconsciously internalize that people of color are relegated to supporting roles in American society. Moreover, non-White children may also receive the message that you may only be the protagonist or hero of a story when you are surrounded/set within a world of phenotypically similar people.

The White privilege represented by this corpus mirrors the historical wealth and inequitable distribution of power that is evident in the United States (Saez & Zucman, 2016). This mirroring between commonly shared and consumed texts in the elementary grades and the sociopolitical context creates a cycle: When non-White characters are present, they are still invisible.

Gender

The United States Census (2010) indicates that females and males each comprise half of the school aged population (non-binary categories are not available in their data). Nearly all books contain representations of both males and females, so women are represented, but they appear primarily in the backgrounds of the majority of the texts in this sample. According to GST scholars, the appearance of gender inequities can have a negative impact on

females' self-esteem while providing males with a sense of entitlement.

Here, the point of discussion is not that there are fewer females presented in the texts overall, but rather that the majority of female characters are neither active in moving the plot forward nor solving the emplotted problems. Gender stereotyping and an underrepresentation of female characters have been documented in children's books in the past (Taylor, 2003). This study aligns with these findings.

The female characters whose roles did not follow this trend exhibited a phenomenon we call "*Little Women* Syndrome." This phenomenon is predominant in texts published prior to 1960 in which the female character demonstrates non-stereotypical gender roles, often portrayed as both assertive and spunky. Jo, the protagonist from Alcott's *Little Women* (1886/89), is also portrayed similarly. Such behavior is explicitly identified in the text's description of the physical presentation of the character or her actions, or in the dialogue. The authors of these texts point out that the female characters are not acting as society expects them to.

The finding that these trends exist in female protagonists appearing prior to 1960 and less so after suggests, perhaps, that the women's liberation movement in the United States that emerged in the late 1960s and continued through the early 1980s may have impacted the ways characters were developed. By the early 1980s, the tomboy character was, in large part, less defiant of societal expectations in conjunction with the women's liberation movement.

It was rare that a male character acted through traditionally feminine behaviors or traits. Yet, books that present readers with non-traditional males open up windows for children, teachers, and caregivers to see positive examples of gay and LGBTQ-affirming relationships. The portrayals of so many boyish boys

within the corpus of Newbery-winners wherein male characters already dominate is especially problematic.

Disability

Large numbers of children with documented disabilities receive services provided by the public school systems. During the 2017-2018 academic year in the United States, under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), approximately seven million children aged 3 to 21 years in the United States received special education services (NCES, 2019a). This population represents 14 percent of all public school children in the same age group. Specific learning disabilities and speech or language impairment comprise the most frequently occurring instances of need, followed by other health impairments that can be classified as physical disabilities in nature.

Few of the novels represent disabilities within the main characters, mirroring the physical and cognitive makeup in school-aged children in the United States. This study shows that children who interact with Newbery-winning books predominately see able-bodied people unless they are old and need mobility assistance, or wear glasses, which is not typically considered a stigma in society. Although screening for vision is a part of prevention for special education services, all children who do wear glasses are not eligible for special education services. In the Newbery-winning sample, we classified three of the 120 main characters as having a physical disability because they wore glasses (21% of the 14 characters classified as people with physical disabilities). Several characters who have cognitive disabilities exist in the sample, but they are from titles that predate or cluster around the IDEA legislation emerging in 1975.

Although the trends observed in Newbery-winning titles around representations of physical and

cognitive disabilities largely mirror trends observed in U.S. schools, representations of social and emotional disability in Newbery-winning titles do not. The CDC (2018) reports that "One in 24 children were diagnosed with anxiety in 2011 to 2012, [and] 1 in 37 children were diagnosed with depression in 2011 to 2012" (n. p.). If the Newbery-winning corpus reflected these data, we would have expected to see at least seven percent (n=8) of the characters portrayed as having a social or emotional disability. The sample here yielded one such main character, the laughing man/Marcus from *When You Reach Me* (Stead, 2009). Given this discrepancy, and the prevalence of social and emotional disabilities in school-aged children, it is safe to say that children who struggle with anxiety and depression are not seeing mirrors of themselves in the characters of these titles, or, rather, social and emotional disabilities are not explicitly implied or named in the texts.

People with disabilities are the same as everyone else, and their disability does not need to be fixed or hidden (Golos & Moses, 2013), nor does it mean they are necessarily "courageous," "brave," "special," or "superhuman." Although it is not unusual for someone with a disability to have talents, skills, and abilities, these ought not be the primary portrayals an audience receives when they encounter characters with disabilities. The Newbery-winning titles generally do not over-emphasize such talents in the differently-abled characters they present.

Limitations

The present study is not without limitations. First, both authors of the study are White, female, and able bodied. We acknowledge that these racial and cultural systems we identify with have impacted our ways of knowing and experiencing the worlds and the words presented within and beyond the Newbery corpus. Our application of critical theories in the larger project sought to reduce the possibility of false

claims and stereotyping that are common when an outsider examines a phenomenon. Yet, we recognize the likelihood that we missed examples that may have been more recognized by researchers who identified as insiders of one or more of the diverse cultural groups this study describes.

Secondly, the findings on intersections of race/ethnicity, gender, and disability are more suggestive than conclusive. There are not enough examples that emerged from within this data set to allow for drawing generalized conclusions. Given the emerging scholarship around intersectionality (Crenshaw, 2005; Nelson & Nelson, 2016), and the important implications our exploratory data might suggest for future work, we decided to retain the results from that analysis in the paper.

Third, the study is well removed from the practice of sharing books with children. We have omitted purchasing and circulation statistics from both school and out-of-school contexts. Accordingly, our discussion steps a bit beyond the findings of the present study into a hypothetical, but logical, argument that is rooted in current census data of child populations. Exploring whether a relationship exists between diversity in the Newbery corpus and the population and the consumption/circulation of the titles is warranted in future studies.

Related, we recognize that comparing 2010 census data to texts published well before 2010 is a stretch given that student populations have changed over time, and as the 2020 census is underway we recognize that student populations continue to

> **"A truly culturally responsive curriculum reflects the range of diversity found in society, which includes a variety of races, ethnicities, genders, and abilities. Bringing an assortment of books that represent an array of diverse populations into our classrooms is a critical step toward this mission."**

change. On the whole, the population of children in the United States has varied, but trends toward being less White (i.e., more racially/ethnically diverse), similarly distributed across the gender spectrum, and varied in reporting disabilities: in 1977 there were 3.7 million children with disabilities in federal special education programs and in 1995, 5.4 million (United States Department of Education, 2000) (these are compared to the nearly 7 million children with disabilities observed in 2019 [NECS, 2019a]). Future studies will examine how diversity in Newbery titles has changed across the decades with respect to student populations.

The final limitation is that Newbery criteria do not specifically address diversity. This study, though, validates the necessity for other awards from ALSC and its affiliates—the Pura Belpré Award, the Coretta Scott King Awards, the American Indian Youth Literature Award, the Asian/Pacific American Award for Literature, the Stonewall Award, Schneider Family Book Award, and the Dolly Gray Book Award—to consider diversity of character and authorship more intentionally.

Implications

Today's student demographics reflect the ever-increasing diversity in contemporary society. However, the results of this study show that the Newbery-winning books often used in the classroom do not match population statistics. Literature often used in the classroom include books teachers already have access to, such as books inherited from previous teachers, titles found in their school libraries, titles

used within commercial reading programs and existing curricula, and approved titles from administrators. Many of these books are Newbery Medal winners. Knowledge of who is depicted in these books is critical as this knowledge can help teachers evaluate who is represented in their curricula and provide insight into where they might need to supplement or alter text selection.

There is an ever-increasing need for culturally responsive pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2015) and the use of diverse literature within the classroom and curricula to match the growing diversity of today's classrooms. Our hope is that teachers will be more aware of the limited capacity of the Newbery corpus, particularly those titles that were published longer ago, to function as effective tools for teaching critically around topics of race/ethnicity, gender, and disability. As the United States becomes more multicultural, so should a child's education: "Culturally responsive classrooms . . . acknowledge the presence of culturally diverse students and the need for these students to find relevant connections among themselves and with the subject matter" (Montgomery, 2001, p. 4). Literacy skills are developed when children take an interest in what

they read. When children relate to and connect to characters in the books they read, they are more likely to read, to value the act of reading, and to enjoy the activity (DeLeón, 2002; Heflin & Barksdale-Ladd, 2001). Increased reading, and talk about the books read, leads to increase in literacy skills (Johnston, 2019). If children are interested in reading about characters who resemble themselves, it stands to reason that having a variety of diverse populations depicted in the literature shared with children in the classroom and curricula can help them become literate and engage with their own learning. One way to acknowledge the presence of diverse students is to include representations of them in the literature used.

A truly culturally responsive curriculum reflects the range of diversity found in society, which includes a variety of races, ethnicities, genders, and abilities. Bringing an assortment of books that represent an array of diverse populations into our classrooms is a critical step toward this mission. Exposing students to a range of diverse populations and engaging them in authentic explorations will model the cultural values and attitudes of the diverse people of the world.

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