Representation in Children's Book Council of Australia Early Childhood and Picture Book Awarded Books (2018-2020)

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Abstract

The call for more diversity in children's literature has increased over the past decade. Many researchers draw on Rudine Sims Bishop's theory of Windows, Mirrors, and Sliding Glass Doors (1990) to argue that children need to be able to see their lives reflected in the media they consume, not just as caricatures or tokenistic characters, but as protagonists and everyday people. The prizing of children's literature acts as a stamp of approval for what is considered quality literature, and often results in an undiscerning market that purchases texts simply because of their awarded prize. The Children's Book Council of Australia (CBCA) Book of the Year award is one of the most prestigious literary awards available in the country, particularly for younger readers. This critical content analysis examines the winners, honoured, and short-listed texts for the Book of the Year awards in the Picture Book and Early Childhood categories for the years 2018-2020. The analysis found that the majority of the texts reinforce the current social and cultural discourse of the straight, white, cis-gendered, able-bodied male. Given the social and cultural impact of the CBCA awards, it is essential that the discourses and ways of being that are represented in the awarded texts are critically investigated to ensure they are representative of their readership and do not perpetuate a damaging message to readers about their or others' identity.

Keywords: picturebooks, diversity, inclusion, gender, Australian children's literature

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Children's literature informs the beliefs and identities of young readers in ways that no other literature does. As children are forming their ideas about the world, they look to the media they consume to understand it (Funk, Kelner and Share 2016). Nothing is as poignant or as powerful as literature in helping children to understand the world, others, and themselves (Hassel and Clasen 2016). Therefore, it is vital that these books are examined and interrogated

for the messages they carry. Given the complex, multicultural, diverse world in which we live, it is imperative that children of all genders, sexes, ethnicities, sexualities, and ability are exposed to texts that highlight their lives. The importance of ensuring all children see themselves as a main character cannot be understated, particularly for those who come from minority communities. However, it is also crucial that characters representing those minorities are also present in the background of other texts, that their stories do not focus exclusively on trying to explain or understand their identity but also accept who they are as only part of their whole identity. The danger of a single story is well documented in its continued oppression of minorities (McDowell 2015, Adichie n.d.). This study examines the representation of diversity in terms of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and ability in Children's Book Council of Australia (CBCA) Book of the Year Early Childhood and Picturebook awarded texts from the year 2018 – 2020. The critical content analysis of these prized books found that overwhelmingly, the awarded texts featured protagonists that were white, cis-gendered, male, and able-bodied.

The prizing of children's literature has a long history that spans far beyond the Australian continent. With the creation of the John Newbery medal by the American Library Association (ALA) in 1921, the professional and institutional prizing of literature has influenced the publishing and book buying communities for centuries (Kidd and Thomas 2016). Using Pierre Bourdieu's concept of social-cultural capital (1986), Kidd and Thomas (2016) argue that the purpose of prizing children's literature is two-fold: the child is rewarded (given a prize) with a book and is then in turn rewarded culturally for their engagement in that book (prizing their education). The texts that children engage with have a huge impact on their lives, particularly at the school level. One only has to look at the cultural phenomenon

that is Bluey or The Wiggles to see how children's texts influence their social lives.[1] The texts that children consume influence their understanding of life, as guides for how the world is or should be as well as acting as social-cultural capital through which they can engage with peers. The CBCA Book of the Year awarded texts often act as catalysts for this social-cultural capital. One only has to look at something as innocuous as *Where is the Green Sheep?* (Fox 2004) to see how winning a CBCA award can catapult a book from a simple story to a multi-media phenomenon. It is vital that the impact of these book awards is investigated and examined, given the influence awarded books have on children's lives and understandings of the world.

The Newbery medal, the first children's literature prize, was developed to trade on Newbery's reputation as the 'father of children's literature,' to create a legitimacy for this emerging sector of 'quality' children's literature (Kidd and Thomas 2016, p.1). The prizing of children's literature has, since then, become the point of origin for creating the standards through which all 'awarded' or 'prized' texts must pass. This has been repeated in the Australian context, creating a culture in which the shiny foil medal printed on the front cover that comes along with the prize, is treated as a stamp of approval, quality, and longevity, establishing a framework against which all Australian children's literature is measured.

The prizing of children's literature is a mechanism for reinforcing the dominant social standards of the current time. However, this can mean that Australian children's literature lacks diverse representation as characters more often match the dominant discourses of white, cis-gendered, middle-class, able-bodied, and male. The prizing of those books that reinforce the dominant social standards act as a record of the current social and cultural milieu, as well as gatekeepers for books that attempt to reject or diminish those beliefs. Critics of literary

prizing, particularly that of children's literature, worry that it affirms and secures social privilege, favouring the dominant group of white male authors, over female and minority authors (Kidd and Thomas 2016). If critics worry about how authors reinforce and secure social and cultural privilege, then too we must consider how characters in these prized books also reflect the dominant social group. The decision of what makes it into the canon is a decidedly political process that affects all Australians (Bates 2013). While CBCA Book of the Year awarded texts only constitute a portion of the Australian literary canon, the awarding or literary prizing of these books is a cultural and social practice that is derived from the logic of literary canons (Hateley 2016). Texts canonised as quality Australian literature based on their prizing are often found in the libraries and classrooms of young children throughout the country. The CBCA award can indicate to some that they are quality texts. The main research question which frames this study is to examine the extent to which CBCA awarded books represent diversity in terms of gender, race, sexuality, disability and place.

Windows, Mirrors and Sliding Glass Doors

In a world with political movements like Black Lives Matter, We Need Diverse Books, and Disrupt Texts advocating for increased diversity and better representation in children's literature, it is more important than ever that we promote 'thoughtful reflection and knowledgeable action' (Johnson, Koss and Martinez 2017, p. 4) on texts that are honoured and then brought into the classrooms and homes of young readers. Rudine Sims Bishop's (1990) seminal work led the way for a new way of viewing literature: as mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors. This influential and original framework through which one can examine children's literature, in particular picture books, allows for close readings and

examinations of both the primary text, as well as the author and illustrators. Sims Bishop contextualises children's literature and picture books as more than merely sites for language and literacy learning:

> A book can sometimes be a window. The view from the window can be imagined or real, familiar or new, panoramic or narrow. Usually, the window is also a door, and a reader has only to walk through in imagination to become a part of whatever world has been created or re-created in the book. When lighting conditions are just right, a window can also be a mirror, reflecting for us the joys and sorrows, the loves and hates, the pain and pleasure of living. One of the reasons literature exists is to transform human experience, and reflect it back to us so that we can better understand it. Through the mirror of literature, we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience. Reading then, becomes a means of self-affirmation, or reaffirming our place in the world and our society. (1990, p. 11)

Sims Bishops' work has allowed further research to be done on the diversity and inclusion in children's literature, highlighting the lack of mirrors for those from diverse communities such as BIPOC, disability, or LGBTQIA+, as well as the prevalence of mirrors and windows into the lives of the dominant social group. An examination of the Top 100 picture books purchased in Australia revealed that where gender is considered, Australia's popular books heavily favour male protagonists (Tilley 2018). Representation in children's books is essential

not only in ensuring that children are able to see themselves, but also so they are able to see others and are not given a skewed sense of their place in the world (Sims Bishop 1990).

Picture books present a unique case for literary analysis, as they are part art and part literature (Nodelman 1990). A picture book cannot be read simply by images or by text; both elements must be read together to understand the story. The relationship between the visual art of illustrations and the written text is complex and nuanced, 'where the pictures do not merely 'illustrate' what's already said in the verbal text, but add something different and new' (Sipe 2011, p. 238) so that the 'synergy' (Sipe 1998, p. 98) between words and pictures add to something 'greater than the sum of its parts' (Sipe 2011, p. 238). This 'intricate dance between words and visual images' is 'the unique contribution of children's literature to the whole of literary endeavour' (Sipe 2011, p. 238). This study closely examines both the written text and illustrations of each book to ensure all elements of diversity are considered.

Picture books, as an art form and vehicle in which to reflect either the dominant or suppressed discourses of society, present a unique scope through which to examine the ideologies that drive their creation and their prizing. As Peter Hunt explains, 'No work, not even the most apparently simple books for children, can be innocent of some ideological freight' (1993, p. 18). It is necessary then to examine the intersectional identities of the main characters of these texts, as these identities will influence, both consciously and sub-consciously, the ideologies present in their texts and how the main character of those texts can be 'read.' Many researchers highlight the importance of literature for children that is reflective of themselves, as well as the world around them.[2] These books must act as mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors to engender ways of being or discourses (Gee 2014) that promote diversity and inclusion.

Stories are by far the most potent means through which perceptions, values, beliefs, and attitudes can be transmitted from one generation to the next (Hourihan 1997). Children's books are important cultural mechanisms (Tsao 2008) for engendering ways of being that promote diversity, multiculturalism, and inclusion. The Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC), which publishes data on the diversity of the American publishing industry each year, notes that while the number of children's books with diverse characters has increased over the last two decades, children's books that depict specific ethnic minorities as primary or main characters were just under 27% in 2019, less than the number of books with animals/other characters at 29%. Approximately 3.1% had characters in the LGBTQ+ community, and only 3.4% represented characters with a disability; the majority (42%) of children's books had white main characters (CCBC 2020).

In the last decade, research devoted to diverse representation in books for children has increased. Koss and Paciga (2020) found that the characters pictured in Newbery awarded titles are not confluent with the diverse populations in America. Similarly, in the United Kingdom, the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (2020) found that although the number of children's books with characters from minority backgrounds has increased, they still made up only 10% of the entirety of books published in 2019, with only 5% of all books published featuring a main character from an ethnic minority. However, it is important to note that there was a significant increase in the representation of characters from ethnic minorities in Picturebooks in 2019, with the overall percentage jumping from 9% to 30%. Caple and Tian (2020) in examining early childhood books, and Garrison (2019a, 2019b) in their examination of young adult fiction texts, both found that there is a significant lack of diverse

representations not only in Australian children's literature, but also in CBCA awarded children's literature.

This project builds on previous research in distinctive ways, examining representations of social constructs in CBCA awarded books from both the Early Childhood category and the Picture Book category. While similar studies (Caple and Tian 2021, Garrison 2019a, 2019b) have investigated awarded texts in Australian's children literature, highlighting the lack of representation for those outside of the straight-white-cisgendered-able bodied-male existence, the focus has been on either Young Adult literature, or solely the Early Childhood category. Similar research has been conducted in the United States where it was found that an overwhelming number of the texts had protagonists that were white, male, or an animal, however the intended readership of the examined awards differs from that of the CBCA Early Childhood and Picture Book categories, and the American context in which they are created, published, and awarded is different to the Australian context. Within the Australian context, a study by Caple and Tian (2021) revealed a nearly equal distribution between human and anthropomorphised animal characters, as well as between male and female characters. However, when it comes to ethnicity, the characters in these texts were predominately white, with 89% of the 1114 characters falling into this category. This study examines not only gender and race/ethnicity in CBCA Book of the Year awarded texts in the Early Childhood and Picture Book categories, but also includes the social constructs of disability and sexuality in its analysis.

Methodology

In this project, I examined CBCA Winners, Honours, and Shortlisted books in the categories of Early Childhood and Picture Books between 2018 and 2020. While similar in form, the Early Childhood and the Picture Book awarded books have substantial differences. These categories have been selected for this project based on the similarities in their form and implied readership. Books that fall into the category of Early Childhood and Picture Book typically are 32 pages in length, heavily illustrated, and feature few (if any) words. To be eligible for the Early Childhood category, books must be suitable both in content and style for pre- and beginning-level readers, with an age range of up to 6 years old. It may include fiction, poetry, wordless, board, and concept books, and the illustrations must reflect all the text on the page but will often not add any additional meaning to the storyline (CBCA 2020b). In contrast, books in the Picture Book category are not aimed explicitly at a young readership, but at readers under the age of 18. These Picture Book titles feature text and illustrations that 'achieve artistic and literary unity' (CBCA 2020a, para 4) where the story is enhanced by the illustrations.

Content analysis has been used to analyse and interpret the data from each book according to pre-determined *a priori* codes of Race/Ethnicity, Gender, Disability, and LGBTQIA+. Krippendorf defines content analysis as 'a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts to the contexts of their use' (2004, p. 18) which can be applied to issues at the intersections of 'culture, social structure, and social interaction' (Weber 1990, p. 11; Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2007). Content analysis describes and interprets 'written artefacts of a society' (White and Marsh 2006, pp. 12-13). Researchers use

qualitative content analysis to infer from texts and interpret within contexts (Johnson, Mathis and Short 2016).

A text must be examined in the context in which it was created and then published. The judging process that determines whether a text is marked as Winning, Honoured, or Shortlisted is based not only on the general judging criteria of the award, but also under the scope of the social milieu of the time. Content analysis takes the texts under examination and then 'analyses, reduces and interrogates them into summary form through the use of both pre-existing categories and emergent themes' (Cohen, Manion and Morris 2007, p. 476). Content analysis focusses on 'literature as representations of human experience' (Johnson, Mathis and Short 2016, p. 4). The critical aspect of content analysis requires 'a stance of locating power in social practices in order to challenge conditions of equity' (Johnson, Mathis, and Short 2016, p. 12). This study uses content analysis to investigate how CBCA Early Childhood and Picture Book awarded texts represent social constructs and whether they reinforce the dominant social group or allow readers from diverse backgrounds to see themselves in the text.

An *a priori* coding system is one based in theory, one that is rational and derived from theoretical studies. The coding system used in this study is based on similar studies.[3] All these studies examine social and/or cultural constructs within children's and young adult literature. The selected texts (a total of 36) were coded based on Race, Gender, Disability, and LGBTQIA+. Each text was analysed based on the written text, the visual images, and its paratextual elements. The texts were categorised according to year and category of award. The protagonists of each book were examined and then coded for race/ethnicity, gender, disability, and LGBTQIA+ indicators.

The categorisations of ethnicity from the most recent (2016) Australian census were used: Oceania and Antarctica, North-West Europe, Southern and Eastern Europe, North Africa and the Middle East, South-East Asia, North-East Asia, Southern and Central Asia, Americas, and Sub-Saharan Africa (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016). From this, a more specific culture or ethnicity was identified where possible. I used ethnicity to refer to a group of people with a shared common and distinctive culture, language, or religion (Oxford Languages 2021). Initially, the ethnicity of the main character was noted as either White, Black, Indigenous, People of Colour (BIPOC), or Unidentifiable. However, once BIPOC characters were identified, I narrowed the parameters and coded specifically for that ethnicity where possible. Because a number of texts featured non-human characters (either animals or toys), I added these codes under the Ethnicity category to distinguish between these two types of non-human characters and to enable me to explore the extent to which these characters enabled ethnicity to be elided.

While coding for gender in children's literature can be problematic, particularly when viewed through a heteronormative male/female binary lens, I also coded for non-binary and gender-fluid representations. Most books were coded based on the pronouns used in the written text in the story, the blurb or the front matter. However, some characters were coded based on visual representations or names given – for example, if a character was called 'Dad' they were coded as male. When relying on visual depictions to ascertain gender, traditionally feminine or masculine traits such as facial hair or body shape/outline also informed the coding. If no gender was obvious, or the text did not specifically represent a non-binary or gender-fluid character, the book was coded as Not Evident.

Disability covers many things, including physical disabilities as well as cognitive and social-emotional disabilities. For the purposes of this study, disability was coded as Visible (physical), Invisible (cognitive and/or social-emotional), or Not Evident when there was nothing to suggest disability. Unless it was explicitly stated in-text, or an adaptive or mobility device was included in the illustrations, characters were coded as able-bodied. Invisible disability was more difficult to discern, despite the fact that five million people in Australia have invisible disabilities (invisibledisabilities.com.au 2021).

Coding for LGBTQIA+ characters is a complex process, particularly in picture books that are aimed at younger readers, where there is not necessarily a large interest in defining sexuality, gender identity, and other ways of being that are related to the LGBTQIA+ community. Both the illustrations and the written text was analysed. No books within the scope of this study used gender neutral pronouns such as they/them, nor were there any specific references to LGBTQIA+ characters or issues within the sample. The coding of this social construct was originally as LGBTQIA+ with the ability to re-examine the text and narrow down the correct code (Lesbian/Non-Binary/Asexual/etc) if there were no characters present that seemed to be a part of the LGBTQIA+ community, then the text was then coded as Not Evident.

Results

This review of CBCA awarded books between 2018 and 2020 reveals a significant lack of diversity and representation. In its totality, it shows that the Early Childhood and Picture Book awarded books still have a long way to go in order to represent the diverse populations of the Australian context (see Figure 1 and Table 1). Based on the infographic published by Huyck and Dahlen (2019) that presents data by the CCBC, Figure 1 shows the overall lack of

representation in CBCA awarded texts in both the Early Childhood and Picture Book
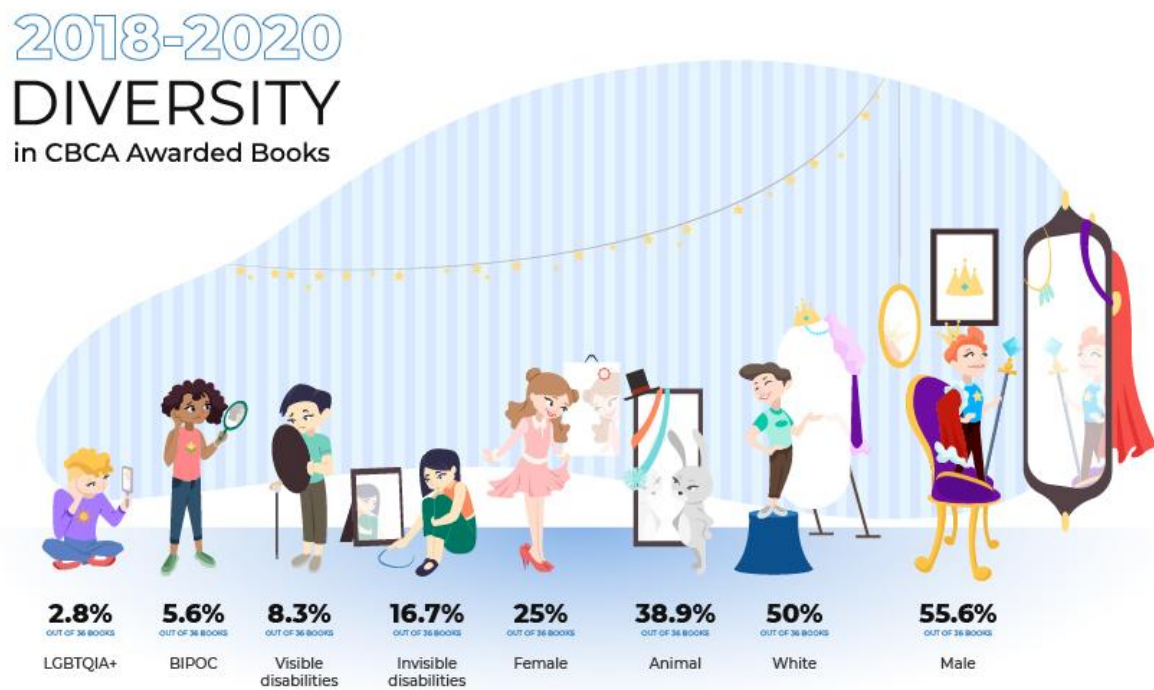
categories from 2018-2020.

Figure 1: Diversity in CBCA Awarded Books (2018-2020) Data Infographic. Illustrated by Natalia Shapovalova

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Early Childhood & Picture Book Yearly	Frequency			
Construct	Code	2018	2019	2020	TOTAL
Gender	Male	5	6	9	20
	Female	5	2	3	10
	Other	2	4	-	6
Race/Ethnicity	White	8	4	6	18
	BIPOC	1	1	-	2
	Animal	3	6	5	14
	Toy	-	-	1	1
	Other	-	1	-	1
Disability	Visible	2	-	1	3
	Invisible	1	3	2	6
	None	9	9	9	27
LGBTQIA+	LGBTQIA+	-	1	-	1
	Heteronormative	12	11	12	35

Table 1 Summary of representation in Early Childhood and Picture Books on CBCA shortlist from 2018-2020

Over three years, and in both CBCA categories, there is a clear trend of white, male, able-bodied and neurotypical characters. Male characters (19) outnumber female characters (9). The code of Other was used when a text had both male and female protagonists as equals, or protagonists with no gender evident. Despite recent calls (Tilley 2018) for a more equal

distribution of genders in children's books, the CBCA award books are not reflecting this need. Even more concerning is the lack of racial or ethnicity representation in the awarded texts. The majority of characters (18) were white, with only 2 texts featuring characters of colour. Further, animal characters are present seven times more often than characters of colour. Representation in terms of disability is equally low, with only 3 texts depicting visibly disabled characters. However, in terms of non-explicit representation, invisible disability is slightly better with 6 texts showing some representation. There was low representation of the LGBTQIA+ community, with only one text that showed a possible inclusion of an LGBTQIA+ character.

When examined by year, 2018 had the least male representation (5), equal to that of female representation. 2018 also had the greatest number of texts featuring white protagonists (8), followed by animal protagonists (3) and only one text featuring a character of colour. Yet this year had the most texts depicting visible disabilities, though this number is still small (2) compared with the number of texts in total for the year (12). Unfortunately, there was no representation of the LGBTQIA+ community. Table 1 demonstrates that 2019 had increased male representation in the awarded books (6), and significantly decreased female representation (2); however, two texts featured both male and female protagonists (2). There was a 50% decrease in texts featuring white characters from the previous year (4). However, the number of texts with animal characters also doubled (6), and only one text featured a character of colour. This year had the lowest number of representations of visible disabilities with no texts with representation. However, it did have the most texts that featured characters with possible invisible disabilities such as anxiety, depression, ADHD, and autism as well as

the only text across all three years with a possible representation of someone in the LGBTQIA+ community.

The most recent year of the study, 2020, showed the highest representation of male characters, the lowest representation of characters of colour, and no representation of the LGBTQIA+ community. The awarded texts in 2020 included 9 with a male main character, three times the number of texts with a female main character (3). Half of the texts featured white protagonists (6), followed closely by animal characters (5). Only one instance of visible disability was included in an awarded text, and two instances of invisible disabilities.

Award Categories

As discussed above, each award category comes with its own criteria and implied audience, and as such the representation of the codes within texts awarded for each category should differ. However, the data revealed fairly consistent findings across all social constructs. When looking at the Early Childhood award, in terms of race/ethnicity, the characters are much more likely to be animals, rather than humans. 'Animal' was established as a coding category after realising that the number of animal characters in these texts was significant, particularly in comparison to the number of characters of colour. The Early Childhood category has a marked increase in animal characters in comparison to the Picture Book category, although both share the same statistics for gender representation. The number of animal characters can be linked to a lack of racialized human characters, suggesting that perhaps animal characters are used to avoid having to racialize characters. One key finding is that the only representation of LGBTQIA+ present in the awarded texts over the last three years appears in the Early Childhood category.

The Picture Book awarded category has a much wider implied readership. However, representation in this category is not much better than that of the Early Childhood category. It shares equivalent gender representation as the Early Childhood award; however, the increase in human characters also meant an increase in white characters. The number of animal characters was reduced, perhaps owing to its wider intended audience. Visible and invisible disability representation doubled from two instances to four, in the Picture Book Category. However, it is still significantly low considering the total number of awarded books over the three years.

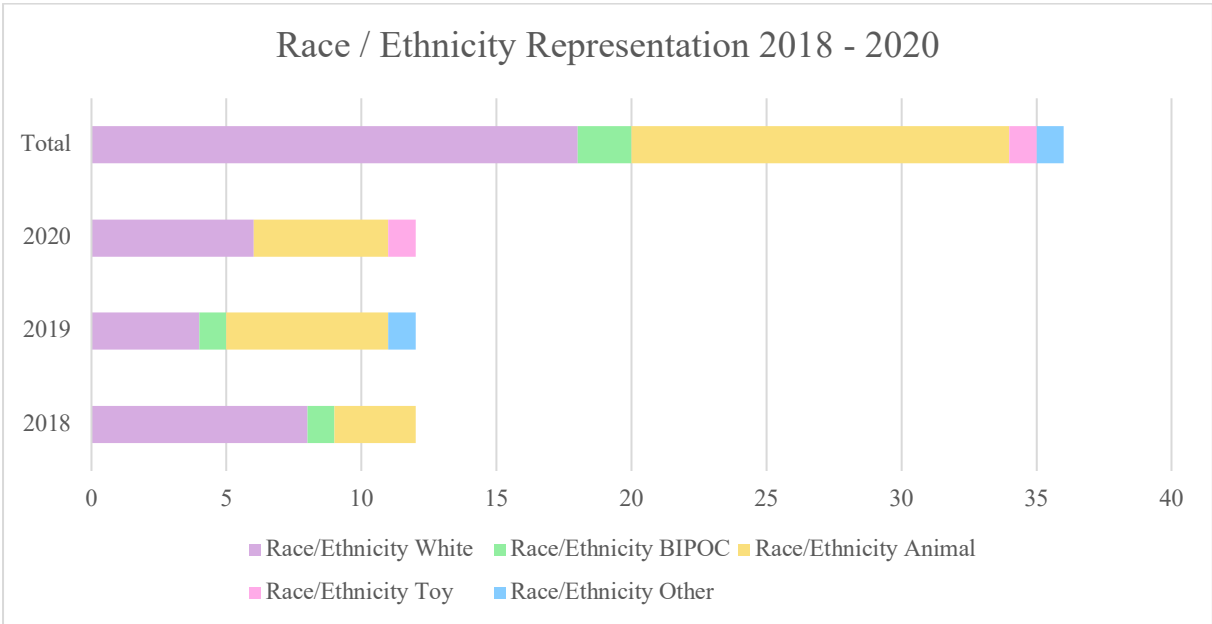## Social Constructs

Race/Ethnicity

Figure 2: Race/Ethnicity Representation in CBCA awarded texts from 2018-2020

Strikingly, as Figure 2 demonstrates, only two characters of colour appeared throughout all three years and both award categories. Moreover, the two BIPOC characters were either male or genderless, and none were female. The high number of animal characters demonstrates an

avoidance of or unwillingness to racialize characters, suggesting that although authors and illustrators may understand that diversity is needed, they may be reluctant to include representations of ethnic diversity. One of the most interesting discoveries is that 2020 had no representation of BIPOC characters. Given the global discussion around race and the importance of diversity, as well as the widely publicised Black Lives Matter protests, it is surprising that the CBCA did not shortlist texts that represented members of BIPOC communities.
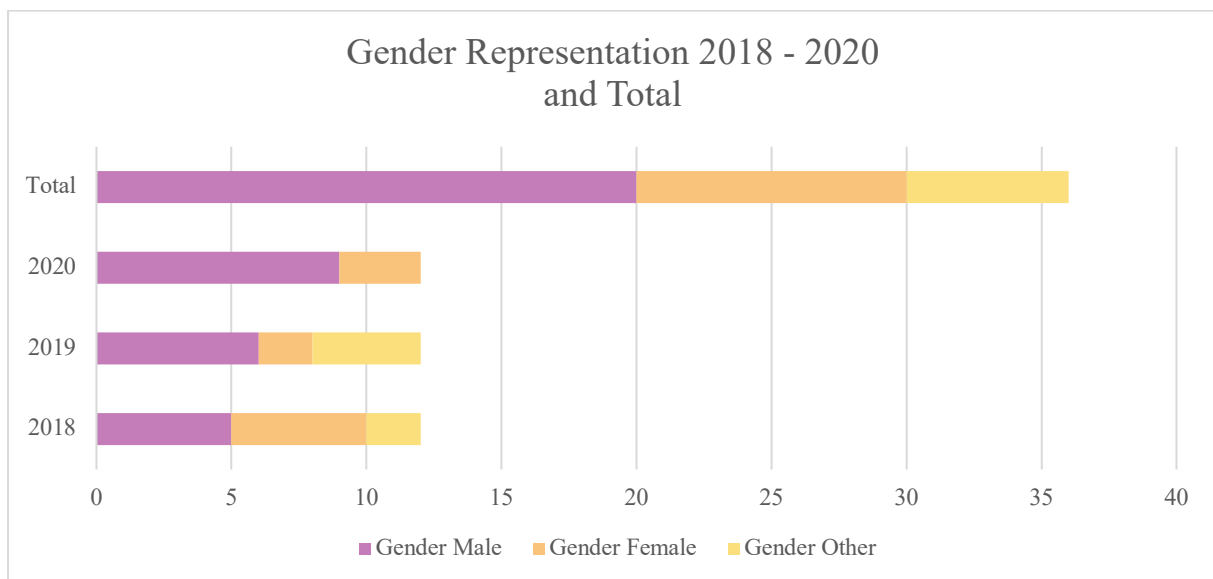
Gender

Figure 3: Gender Representation in CBCA awarded texts from 2018-2020

In terms of gender, male representation increased over time, which is somewhat surprising considering the social milieu in which the texts were published (see Fig. 3). There was a large jump from 2019 to 2020, where male representation went from six to nine texts. Although

there was a decrease in texts with female protagonists in 2019, there was a slight increase in

2020, though not to the same number that there were in 2018.
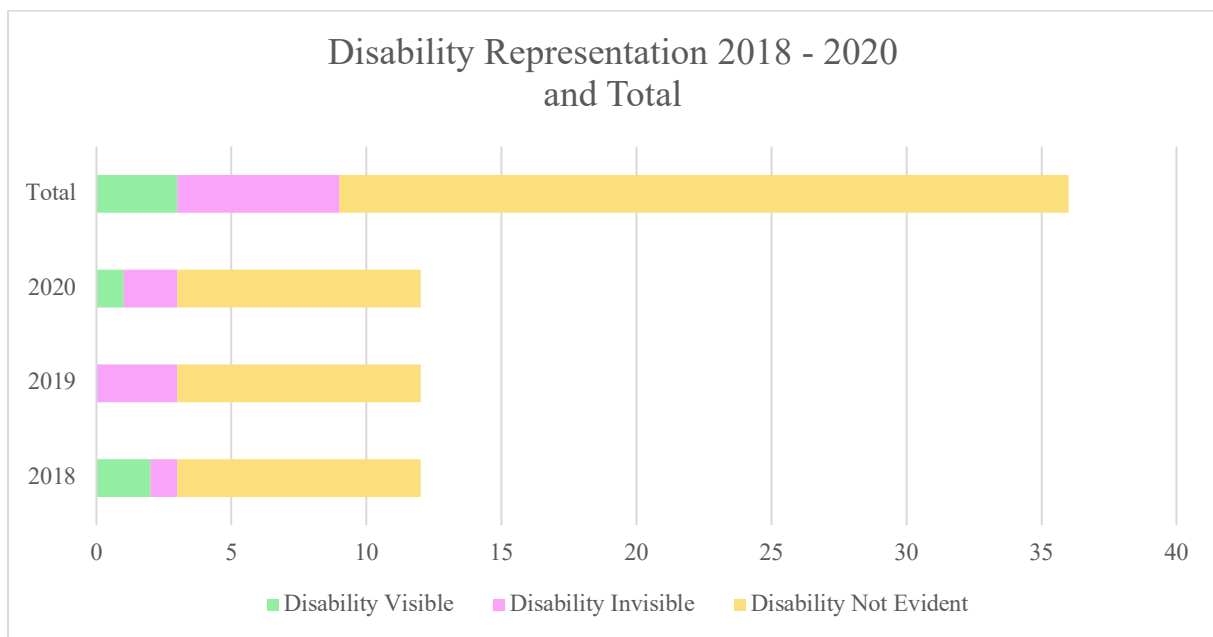
Disability

Figure 4: Disability Representation in CBCA awarded texts from 2018-2020

Representations of disability were also lacking in both award categories (see Fig. 4). Main

characters with a visible disability were all male. However, if the coding is expanded to

include background characters, there is an additional text with one female character using a

mobility aide. Invisible disability was also mostly male characters (4) with one female

character and one gender non-evident character. It is essential to note here that although there

were no pronouns used for the gender not-evident character, the character's clothing would

typically suggest male.

LGBTQIA+

There was only one instance of possible LGBTQIA+ representation in any of the 36 awarded books. The text was an Early Childhood awarded text which showed its protagonist, a male animal character, wearing bright red heels in a suburban setting. This outfit was not mentioned in the story or paratext, suggesting that any connections to the LGBTQIA+ community were not to be the focus of the book. The text follows a simple story, where the main character is having a bad day and is eventually able to be cheered up. However, the inclusion of a traditionally feminine coded footwear suggests that although the character's pronouns were he/him in the text, the character may be gender-fluid or non-binary.
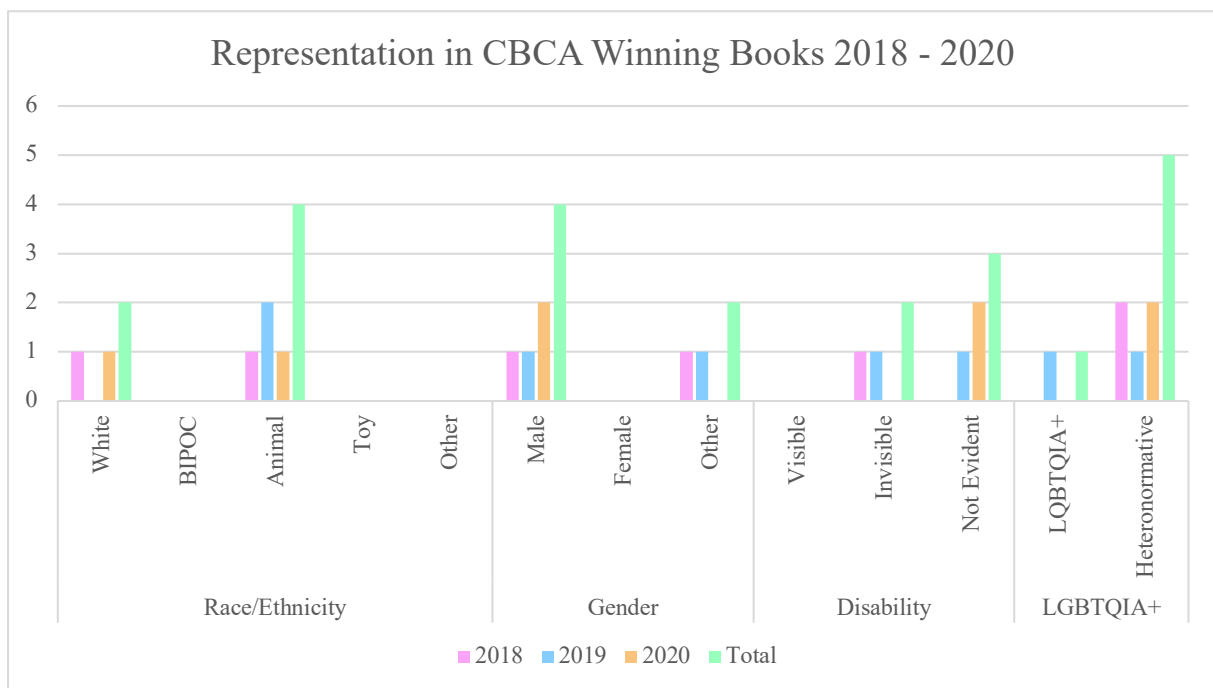
Winners

Figure 5: Representation in Winning texts across both Early Childhood and Picture Book categories

Examination of the Winning texts in both categories across 2018-2020 revealed a consistent pattern of low representation across all constructs. As Figure 5 shows, no characters of colour

were found in the winning texts, nor was there any representation of female characters or visible disabilities. The one standout in the winning texts is that one had a possible representation of a LGBTQIA+. This is the only representation of LGBTQIA+ characters throughout the entire data set, so it is interesting that it is not only an awarded text but a winning text. Unfortunately, the lack of representation in the winning texts is indicative of the lack of representation in CBCA awarded books, and of a wider trend that reinforces the dominant social standards of the current social and cultural milieu.

Discussion

Only two texts explicitly mention the characters' ethnicity. *I'm Australian Too* by Mem Fox is aimed at showcasing a variety of ethnicities and cultures, and while its attempt may have been with good intentions, its representation of people of colour is limited, and it uses language that supports a Euro-centric white version of Australians. The book's premise is that of different children sharing where they have 'come from' and then asking the next character where they were from. On the surface, this may seem to be a harmless way of sharing the diverse range of cultures that exists in Australian society, however the language used reveals an 'us versus them' mentality, as immigrant children recount how their family came to the country, contrasted with the children whose parents were born in Australia. The accompanying text highlights how Australian it is for the white character's parents to both be born in the country. The text implies that people born outside of Australia are not genuinely Australian. In the pages that follow, a presumably Indigenous child discusses 'sharing' the country with everyone else. Although as Indigenous people they have more right than anyone to comment on how Australian they are just as the other characters did, the text fails to

highlight this. The absence of these words in the illustration of an Indigenous family suggests an underpinning ideology that Indigenous Australians are not considered Australian, and that Indigenous Australians are separate to white Australians. This pattern of children sharing where their family came from and asking the same question continues throughout the text, suggests that Australia is solely a place comprised of migrants from other countries. Given the commonality with which children in Australia are asked 'when did your family move to Australia' and the barriers that indigenous students often face (Korff 2021), it is evident that this ideology continues to pervade not only classrooms, but also the texts and media that children are exposed too.

Children's literature acts as a space that at once 're-enforces gender constructions and encourages a re-imagination or subversion of those constructions' (Long 2016, p. 272). Gender provided perhaps the most discussion for the study, yet most, if not all, texts seemed to reinforce traditional binary stereotypes of both genders. Using Stephens's (1996) schemata for gendered behaviours, characters coded as male typically performed behaviours from the masculinity schema, while those coded as female typically performed behaviours from the femininity schema. *Bat vs Poss* by Alexa Moses even went so far as to name its anthropomorphised female protagonist Meek, essentially labelling them with what is an expected trait of their sex. When Meek does demonstrate an ability to behave outside of their assigned schema, standing up against abusive behaviours from a male character, they are reminded by another female character to be kind, demonstrating that the text privileges female passivity and negotiation while failing to criticise poor or abusive behaviours. This trend continued throughout most of the texts; anytime a character did not behave in accordance with the accepted gender schemata, they were treated as an aberration and either shunned or

quickly reminded of their place. The one exception to this was the only occurrence of a possible LGBTQIA+ character. In *A Walk in the Bush* by Gwyn Perkins, the male protagonist is shown subtly dressing in typically feminine clothing, however the ubiquitousness in which this is treated, as well as the mother's career, and the stay-at-home father, shows that the text tacitly rejects traditional gender roles in a number of ways. Although all characters seem to use cis-gendered pronouns, both the father's and protagonist's behaviours do not fit simply into the traditionally male side of Stephens' schemata. Given the number of books in the data set, it is disappointing to see only one text included within this category; however, it is also encouraging that there was any inclusion at all, as many of the awarded texts made no mention or inference at all.

While overall representation of disability in the awarded texts was low (33.33%), the quality of that representation was not entirely negative. Instead, some elements of representation stood out in both main and background characters. Disability is an essential topic that must be addressed for young readers; however, attempts at illustrating disability and its acceptance can perpetuate stereotypical representations. *Boy* by Phil Cummings appeared, on the surface, to be an example of quality representation for people with disabilities, particularly those in the deaf community. The text features a protagonist who could not hear but was happy and follows a traditional fairy tale storyline and setting. This character is never named, essentially reducing their identity to someone who cannot hear. Most of the background characters refuse to engage in signing with the character, choosing instead to remark how strange they are, until they happen to save the lives of everyone in the village. Only then, when the protagonist has proven themselves useful, are they accepted into the

community, perpetuating a deficit view of those with disabilities, in which a person with a disability must prove themselves worthy before receiving basic human kindness.

Conclusion

As with the majority of studies, the design of the current study is subject to limitations. Specifically, limitations surrounding the data set, time constraints, previous research, and the researcher's own biases. The sample size is small and focussed solely on the awarded texts in only two of the CBCA award categories. It would also be useful to consider texts submitted for consideration and those placed on the long list, before the shortlisted and prized texts were announced. Although much research into the diversity of children's books, prized children's books, and even the publishing industry has occurred internationally, more research is needed in the Australian context. Finally, the potential influence of the researcher's bias must be acknowledged. When conducting research into representations of diversity in children's literature, it is essential that as a cis-gendered, middle-class white woman I recognise my privilege and how my previous experiences may influence my interpretation of both narrative and data. While all possible steps were taken to ensure that this did not occur, there is no way to say for certain, that an unconscious bias did not influence an interpretation of the data.

Nonetheless, this research paints a clear picture of a lack of diversity in CBCA Early Childhood and Picture Book awarded texts. The representation of mostly male, white, protagonists demonstrates poor gender and racial diversity. There is a significant lack of disability representation, both visible and invisible, and only one possible representation of an LGBTQIA+ character. The Picture Book winners had more white characters (2) than the Early Childhood winners (0); however, all protagonists of the Early Childhood winners were

animals (3). The Picture Book and Early Childhood winning texts also had no representation of female characters, with the Picture Book winners (2) having only one less than the Early Childhood winners (3). Neither category winners had representation of visible disability, and both had only one winning text with an instance of invisible disability. In the data's entirety, the significant absence of diverse characters that are truly representative of Australian society is difficult to miss. This paints a rather bleak picture of the landscape of children's literature and by extension, the version of the worlds presented to young readers.

Notes

1. *Bluey* and *The Wiggles* are popular Australian children's television shows that have developed books, toys, and other merchandise sold in retail and department stores based on their popularity.

2. See Aho & Alter (2018); Chapman (2020); Collier (2016); Crawley (2018); Johnson, Koss and Martinez (2017); Koss, Johnson and Martinez (2017:2018); Sims Bishop (1990); Tilley (2018); Tsao (2008); Wissman (2018) and more.

3. See Garrison (2019a, 2019b), Johnson, Koss, and Martinez (2017), Koss (2015), Koss, Martinez and Johnson (2017), Koss and Paciga (2020), and Martinez, Koss, and Johnson (2016).

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