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Please note that (1) considerable editing has taken place after this version, so please make sure that you check the published version if you want to quote from this chapter *verbatim*; (2) in the print version, the pictures are in black-and-white.

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The depiction of family and self in children's picture books: a corpus-driven exploration

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"Books became our language.
Books became our home.
Books became our lives.

We learned to read."

(Dreamers, 2019)

Abstract

We analysed 30 English awarded and non-awarded picture books for children depicting families and gender roles, combining an intra- and intertextual corpus-driven approach.

Focusing on the pictures, we systematically attempted to answer the following questions:

What can be said about the child protagonist in terms of sex, skin colour, and gender preferences? Which persons in and outside of the family are depicted, and what can be said

about them in terms of these variables and roles? Do we see instances of positive and negative physical contact? Where do activities take place? Do “arts” and “sports” play a role in the stories? Is the child’s imagination stimulated? In the final part we briefly discuss other themes that deserve systematic research in this genre.

Keywords: children picture books; depiction of family; gender roles; diversity; corpus research; visual studies; multimodality

Introduction

If young children are lucky enough to be read to by their parents or other care-givers, the picture books chosen for reading enormously help the children understand what a family is, or can be, as well as reinforce (or challenge) stereotyped or gender-related preferences in terms of sexuality, appearance and activities worth pursuing. Picture books provide a safe space for adult readers to address complex issues and for children to construct a plural identity. As Morales states in *Dreamers*, books are indeed “language,” “home,” and “lives.” Pictures in such books will help form children’s ideas about families and gender as well as about the wider world within which these family and gender roles are construed. To spawn more insights into such family portrayals we selected 30 children’s books. Given space limitations we have decided to focus on the pictures which, unlike the text, are presumably largely understandable to pre-literate children.

The structure of the chapter is as follows. In the second and third sections we explain how we compiled the corpus and the way we analysed the books. Subsequently, we present our findings of the dimensions discussed. Next, we reflect on other aspects that we found striking. After acknowledging the limitations of our exploratory analysis, we end with brief concluding remarks.

Description of the corpus

We wanted to be optimally open-minded and minimize any biases we might have in analysing depictions of the family, and thereby increase the chances of discovering unanticipated patterns. We therefore decided to analyse three subcorpora, each consisting of ten picture books (as opposed to illustrated books, see Gibson 2010: 101) for children in (or translated into) English, and randomly selected. The selection criteria were the following: the books (i) told a story; (ii) had a length of no more than 44 pages; (iii) relied on both textual and visual modes to convey meaning. We compiled the three lists of books, which for practical purposes were all accessed digitally, as follows:

- (1) Ten prize-winning picture books retrieved from the Children’s Library of the International Youth Library online catalogue, and within the Children’s Library Catalogue, using the filters “eng” for language and “kinship” (or German “*Verwandtschaft*”) in November 2020. The search yielded a total of 1,235 hits. We considered a book to have been “prize-winning/awarded” if it had won one or more of the following prestigious prizes: Boston Globe-Horn Book Awards, 1967-2020; Coretta Scott King Book Awards, 1970-2020; Horn Book Fanfare Best Book, 2001-2020; John Newbery Medal 1922-2020; and/or Randolph Caldecott Medal 1938-2020. Two websites were consulted to check for awards: *Teaching Books* and *MyLibrary Search*.
- (2) Ten non-prize-winning picture books, retrieved as in (1), selected according to the same procedure. We considered a book to have been “non-awarded” if it had won none of the prize(s) specified under (1) *and* if it had won no more than two other prizes (given that there are many prizes for children’s books).
- (3) Ten randomly selected awarded picture books from the AMULIT corpus, provided by the editors of the current volume. This corpus comprises 38 books, subdivided into four

subsections: boys as main characters; girls as main characters; two fathers; and two mothers. We ensured that our selection comprised at least two specimens from each of these four subcategories, considering as “awarded” those books that featured on at least one of the websites we used to identify the awarded books in (1), and had won at least one of the prizes specified under (1).

We selected these three subcorpora because we were interested to see whether children’s picture books that were considered unusually good by juries of experts, and hence won prestigious prizes, might emphasize different things than non-awarded books and prize-winning books specifically devoted to non-stereotypical families and gender roles.

Below, we summarize the storylines of each of the books, in alphabetical order per subcorpus. The abbreviated titles are used in later sections. Unless indicated otherwise, characters mentioned have the same skin colour as the protagonist child. The originals of the pictures included in this chapter are all in colour.

3.1 Awarded books subcorpus [AWS]

- *Double Bass Blues/DBB* focuses on a young black boy, little Nic, whose passion is playing the bass. He practices at a music school, and plays music with his “granddaddy,” also called Nic, and the latter’s friends.
- *Dreamers*. A dark-coloured mother narrates how she and her son emigrate from Mexico to the USA. The journey is long, and upon arrival she struggles with the English language and with local customs, but they end up feeling at home without suppressing their native identities.
- *Grandfather’s Journey/GJ*. A grandson tells how his Japanese grandfather emigrated to the USA, and ever since has felt torn between his native and his adopted country. Like him, the grandson feels his identity is linked to the USA as well as to Japan.

- *Grandpa Green/GG*. A white boy narrates about the life of his *great*-grandfather (despite the book's title). Almost all pictures depict a boy, who at times could also be interpreted as grandpa's younger self, trimming trees and bushes in the garden. The horticultural art depicts people and events from grandpa's past: the garden "remembers for" him. The last picture suggests the grandson will pursue grandpa's passion for topiary gardening.
- *Julián is a Mermaid/JiaM*. Julián, dark-coloured, swims with his grandmother ("abuela") in a swimming pool. In the tram, travelling back to the grandmother's house, Julián (her "mijo") reads a book about mermaids and sees three beautiful women transform into mermaids. At his grandmother's house he dresses up in a curtain, arranges flowers in his hair, and puts on lipstick. His grandmother gives him a necklace. Dressed up as a mermaid Julián is led by her to a parade where there are many other people, with various skin colours, exuberantly dressed as sea creatures.
- *Knock Knock: My Dad's Dream for me/KK*. A black, nameless, boy tells how his beloved "papa," with whom he used to play "Knock Knock" first thing in the morning, mysteriously disappears one day, and how he misses him dearly. The story never reveals why he went away (although the author's note mentions a father in prison). One day, the father writes back a letter, encouraging his son to help his mama and fulfil his dreams about the future. These envisaged dreams are depicted in the following scenes.
- *Last Stop on Market Street/LSoMS*. CJ, a black boy, needs to come to terms with the fact that he does not belong to the class of materially privileged people in his neighbourhood. It is his grandmother who keeps reminding him of good aspects of what he initially sees as obstacles and problems in his disadvantaged life. They undertake a trip by bus to the soup kitchen where CJ and his grandmother help out.
- *One Cool Friend/OCF*. Elliot, a studious, formally dressed white boy who enjoys being on his own, nonetheless is looking for a friend. His father, also focused on books, takes

him to the public aquarium, from where Elliot takes home one of the penguins, baptized Magellan. Magellan becomes his friend and alter-ego. His father turns out to have a turtle, Captain Cook, as his friend.

- *The Hello, Goodbye Window/THGW*. A nameless white girl relates how she always has a good time with her white grandfather, “poppy,” who habitually makes breakfast and plays the mouth organ, and her dark-coloured grandmother, “nanna,” who loves gardening. Interestingly, the grandparents have different skin colours. The “hello, goodbye window” in the grandparental home is special, as it symbolizes the girl’s arrival and departure as well as providing visual access to interesting things that happen in the “outside” world.
- *When We were Alone/WWwA*. Helping her grandmother in the garden, a nameless, coloured girl narrates how “Kókom” tells about her difficult childhood, when she was forced to suppress her Cree identity. She tells about this past trauma to her grandchild (“Noisim”) and contrasts it with her current pride being a Cree.

3.2 Non-awarded books [NAWS]

- *Book of Big Brothers/BoBB*. A nameless white boy tells the story of the complex relationship with his two older brothers, who both tease and help him.
- *Dancing with Daisy/DwD*. Liam (white) looks at photographs in his grandfather’s album. “Grampy,” a fisherman, poetically explains that he has come to look as old as he does because he had to “dance” with a storm, Daisy, who is compared to a “banshee” (female spirit). In the end “Nana” manages to save Grampy from her “rival” Daisy.
- *Hurricane*. A hurricane causes a big tree in the family’s garden to topple over. There is concern about the pet cat’s safety. The two white brothers, David and George, use the toppled tree to play out fantasy adventures.
- *I am NOT Sleepy and I will NOT go to Bed/IaNS*. Charlie (white) tells how difficult it is

to get his younger sister Lola into bed. Lola imagines various animals that supposedly prevent her from doing so.

- *Little Miss, Big Sis/LMBS*. A nameless white girl learns how to deal with, and appreciate, the birth and growing up of a younger boy sibling.
- *Max Meets a Monster/MMaM*. Max (white) is excited by the prospect of sleeping over, for the first time, at his grandfather's house. But at night he thinks he hears a monster. Going about to find it, he discovers it is his grandfather snoring.
- *My Brother/MB*. A nameless young white boy expresses his admiration for his "cool" older brother. At the end it is emphasized that he himself is "cool," too.
- *Octopus Stew/OS*. The Afro-Latino Ramsay accompanies his grandmother to a fishmonger to buy octopus for dinner. At home in the kitchen, the octopus comes alive and "super-hero" Ramsay saves his "wela" from its tentacles. In the end the grandmother decides to make a salad *without* octopus and "Señor Pulpo" joins the two for dinner.
- *The Frank Show/TFS*. A nameless white boy protagonist tells how he needs to give a "show-and-tell" presentation at school about a member of the family. The obvious candidate is his grandfather Frank, but he initially thinks Frank is not interesting enough. In the end all his classmates love Frank and his stories (Figure 2).
- *The Key to my Heart/ TKtmH*. The loss of a set of keys turns into a bonding experience between a (white) father and his son, Jonathan. They start searching for it in their vibrant and welcoming neighbourhood. The set is found because it has the son's portrait (the "key to the father's heart") on the keyring.

3.3 Books from the AMULIT corpus [AMS]

- *And Tango Makes Three/ATMT*. Apparently based on a true event, the book depicts how two male penguins, Roy and Silo, who, as the text states, "love each other" in the New

York zoo in Central Park together hatch an egg provided for them by white caretaker Gramzay and raise the chicken penguin (Tango), undertaking various activities together.

- *Daddy's Roommate/DR*. An unnamed white boy tells how his “daddy,” discovering his gayness, divorced his “mommy” and starts to live together with Frank. The book depicts activities the son undertakes with the two men, showing that it is perfectly normal to have two fathers.
- *Heather has Two Mummies/HhTM*. Heather (white), who has a preference for the number “two,” has two mothers, Kate and Jane. On her first day at school, she discovers that her classmates come from families with all kinds of compositions. “The most important thing about a family is that all the people in it love one another.”
- *King and King/KaK*. The queen is tired of ruling the country and decides her (white) son needs to get married and succeed her. The prince does not like the (variously coloured) princesses paraded before him but falls in love with a princess’ brother – and they marry.
- *Mom and Mum are Getting Married/ MaMaGM*. Rosie (white) hopes that she can be flower girl and carry the rings during the wedding ceremony of her two mothers.
- *My Princess Boy/MPB*. The (dark) son of the narrating mother seeks acceptance for his preference for stereotypically girly clothes, jewellery, colours, and behaviours, such as performing and dancing. He is supported by his family and others in his environment.
- *The Paper Bag Princess/TPBP*. Princess Elizabeth (white) is in love with prince Ronald, who is abducted by a dragon. Cleverly hoodwinking the dragon, she comes to save her prince. Ronald is offended by her being dressed in a paper bag and urges her to come back when she is dressed like a “real princess.” Elizabeth calls him a bum and decides not to marry him after all.
- *The Princess Knight/TPK*. Princess Violetta (white), raised by her father like her three older brothers, acquires stereotypically “male” preferences and abilities in terms of

enjoying (and being very good at) horse-riding and jousting. She refuses to be the bride-prize to be given away to the best jouster, and ingeniously prevents this from happening. Eventually she marries the rose gardener's son (Fig. 3).

- *The Sissy Duckling/TSD*. Elmer, a male duckling with “effeminate” predilections and behaviours who finds fulfilment in his hobbies, has trouble finding acceptance by others, specifically his father – but eventually succeeds.
- *Tough Boris/TB*. A young, unnamed white boy meets with Boris and his fellow pirates: tough, scary, and scruffy men. But when his parrot dies, Boris cries. The boy plays his violin at the parrot's burial-at-sea. The boy concludes: “All pirates cry ... and so do I.”

Method of analysis

Following Bednarek and Caple's (2017) topology for (multimodal) discourse analysis, our analysis centers on quadrant 2 (intertextual-intrasemiotic) and occasionally focuses on quadrant 1 (intertextual and intersemiotic). Our aim was to examine the visual elements in the book that pertain directly, or indirectly, to the representation of families, and uncover dimensions and tendencies that deserve more systematic investigation in future research, only taking into account written text when this helped disambiguate or enhance visual information (for instance: the identity of a depicted person). We systematically inventoried the following dimensions.

- (1) Who is the child protagonist? Pertinent aspects are the child's name, sex, skin colour, and gender preferences (if thematized).
- (2) Which members of the family are depicted? What, if anything, can be said about them in terms of sex, skin colour, and gender preference? Are any (toy) pets depicted?
- (3) Which people outside of the family, if any, are depicted? What, if anything, do we

know about them, judging from their appearance and activities?

- (4) Do we see any instances of positive physical intimacy involving the protagonist or others? Is any negative physical contact depicted or suggested?
- (5) Where do the events depicted take place? At home? In open-air public space? In public buildings associated with specific functions?
- (6) Are any objects and/or activities depicted that suggest that the child is exposed to, or encouraged to practice, art and sports?
- (7) Which activities are performed (or: imagined!) by the child protagonist? Here both portrayed actions and objects or locations that function as metonymies for these actions (e.g., Forceville 2009, Moya-Guijarro and Begoña Ruiz Cordero 2020) are germane.

The analyses were based on a combination of individual and joint close “readings” (of both the visuals and the accompanying text (Doonan 1993: 11 *et passim*) by the two authors. We took great care to ensure that we paid attention only to dimensions (or: variables) that were *demonstrably* identifiable in the visuals.

Results

The tables below summarize dimensions that we systematically checked in the picture books. We discuss some of the findings of each table in more detail. Abbreviated titles used as examples appear in between brackets, in alphabetical order within each subcorpus: awarded books [AWS], non-awarded books [NAWS], and books from AMULIT [AMS]. The subcorpora are separated by semi-colons.

Depiction of people within and outside the family of the main protagonist child

Table 1 charts which people are depicted in the books apart from the child protagonist. All of the main characters in the books, with the exception of *OCF*; *ATMT*, and *TSD*, are human. Gender is thus made visually explicit. This is worth noting as opting for animal characters (and toys, and inanimate objects, for that matter) may hide the depiction of gender (Svensson 1999, quoted in Nikolajeva and Scott 2006: 92; cf. Sundarlane 2010: 56), which can be convenient as well as challenging. Animals are thus a strategic resource to re-address “otherness” in the context of children’s picture books.

	Awarded general books [AWS]	Non-awarded books [NAWS]	Awarded AMULIT books [AMS]
Mother(s)/female caregiver(s)?	<i>Dreamers, GJ, KK, THGW</i>	<i>BoBB, Hurricane, LMBS, OS, TFS, TKtmH,</i>	<i>DR, HhTM, KaK, LMBS, MaMaGM, MPB, TSD, TPK</i>
Father(s)/male caregiver(s)?	<i>GJ, KK, OCF, THGW</i>	<i>BoBB, Hurricane, LMBS, OS, TKtmH,</i>	<i>ATMT, DR, MPB, TSD, TPK</i>
Brother(s) and/or sister(s)?		<i>BoBB, Hurricane, IaNS, LMBS, MB, OS, TFS</i>	<i>LMBS, MaMaGM, MPB, TPK</i>
Grandparent(s)?	<i>DBB, GJ, GG JiaM, LSoMS, THGW, WWwA</i>	<i>DwD, MMaM [Fig. 1], OS, TFS [Fig. 2]</i>	<i>MaMaGM</i>
Friends & schoolmates?	<i>DBB, GG, GJ, JiaM, LSoMS, OCF, WWwA</i>	<i>BoBB, TFS, TKtmH,</i>	<i>ATMT, HhTM, MPB, TSD, TPBP</i>
Others?	<i>DBB, Dreamers, GJ, GG, JiaM, KK, LSoMS, OCF, THGW, WWwA</i>	<i>BoBB, DwD, Hurricane, MB, OS, TFS, TKtmH,</i>	<i>ATMT, DR, HhTM, KaK, MaMaGM, TSD, TB, TPBP, TPK</i>

Table 1. NB1. The absence of a depicted father or mother may mean s/he is not/no longer part of the family, or be coincidental. Similarly, absence of brothers and sisters may mean the protagonist is an only child, or be coincidental. NB2. In *WWwA* it is the schoolmates of the grandmother-as-child that are depicted. NB3. In *DwD* the personified storm (“Daisy”) was counted under “others.”

As transpires from Table 1, strikingly often, grandparents function as role models or “helpers” (Greimas, as discussed in Bal 2017: 170) of the child. In NAWS there seems to be less

emphasis on the grandparental figure as role model, and more on affection and time spent together (but cf. *TFS*, Figure 2). Quite often, the grandparent is addressed with an endearing name (e.g., Grampy,” “Nana,” “Nókom”). Several times, a grandparent is depicted him/herself as a child, reinforcing the continuity of families across generations (*GG*, *GJ*, *WWwA*; *TFS*). Photographs and other types of portraits of ancestors also emphasize such continuity (*GJ*, *OCF*; *DwD*; *TPK*). Often only one grandparent is depicted in a story – which may suggest the other grandparent is no longer alive, implicitly portraying loss (Figures 1 and 2). In several books other characters (friends and schoolmates [Figure 2], friends of (grand)parents, and other family members) depicted might be considered in terms of an “extended family” (*DBB*, *GG*, *JiaM*, *OCF*, *WWwA*; *OS*; *KaK*, *MaMaGM*, *TPK*, *TSD*).

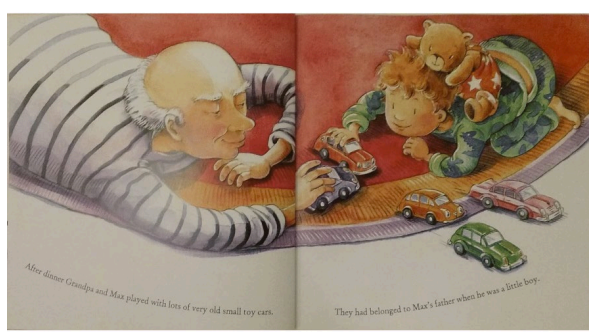


Fig. 1. Max, accompanied by his teddy bear, sleeps over for the first time at his grandfather’s home. Their closeness appears by their playing, in “mirror” position, with toy cars together. The text mentions Max’ father also played with them – showing continuity across the generations. From *Max Meets a Monster*. Illustrations © Chantal Stewart. New Frontier.



Fig. 2. Grandfather Frank tells stories as part of his grandson’s “tell-and-show” and proudly reveals his tattoo. Notable is diversity in terms of skin colour and a girl with a head scarf. Behind Frank we see his cherished jar with pickled onions (intratextuality), and the pet dog. From *The Frank Show*. Text and illustrations © David Mackintosh. HarperCollins Children's Books.

Recurring “helpers” in the “others” category are teachers (*DBB*; *HhTM*, *TKtmH*. *TSD*; exceptionally *WWwA* has an “opponent” school teacher) and librarians (*Dreamers*, *OCF*).

LSoM stands out for its varied representation of age, disabilities, skin colour, and economic status.

Depictions of diversity (in the environment) of main protagonist child

Since the AMS corpus was compiled precisely on the premise of “non-typical” gender behaviour, unsurprisingly all books in it qualify on this criterion. Another dimension of diversity we classified is “skin colour.” Finally, we grouped together some other aspects of people that arguably show in what respects they can be visually different from one another.

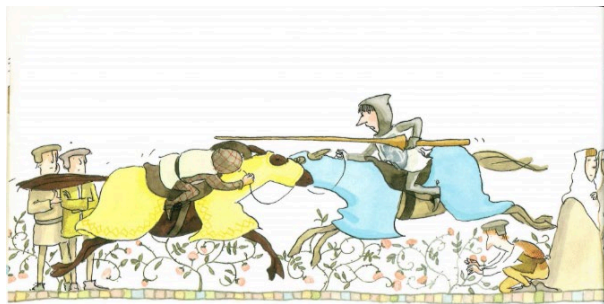


Fig. 3. Princess Violetta (left) and one of her brothers practice jousting. The rose gardener’s son, whom she will eventually marry, is seen on the right. The pink roses, present throughout the book, function as an intratextual metonymy for the rose gardener’s son. From *The Princess Knight*. Illustrations © Kerstin Meyer. The Chicken House.



Fig. 4. The hero does not conform to stereotypical masculine behaviour and refuses to play baseball, self-confidently throwing away his cap. His father and others watch disapprovingly. From *The Sissy Duckling*. Illustrations © Henry Cole. Simon & Schuster.

	Awarded general books [AWS]	Non-awarded books [NAWS]	Awarded AMULIT books [AMS]
Persons with different skin colour than child depicted?	<i>DBB, Dreamers, GJ, JiaM, LSoMS, THGW, WWwA</i>	<i>BoBB, OS, TFS</i>	<i>ATMT, DR, HhTM, KaK, MaMaGM, MPB, TB, TPK, TSD</i>
Non-typical gender preferences/behaviour depicted?	<i>JiaM</i>	<i>TKtmH</i>	<i>ATMT, DR, HhTM, KaK, MaMaGM, MPB, TB, TPBP, TPK, TSD</i>
People with “non-standard” appearances (head scarf, disability, tattoo, pink/mohawk hairdo, non-grandparental elderly people) depicted?	<i>DBB, Dreamers, JiaM, LSoMS, OCF</i>	<i>TFS, TKtmH</i>	<i>ATMT, HhTM, KaK, TB, TPK</i>

Table 2. NB1. We considered the variety of ducks depicted and the depiction of other kinds of animals (rabbits? squirrels?) in *TSD* as paralleling “different skin colours” (Figure 4); in *ATMT* this variety pertains to visitors to the zoo. NB2. The “others” in *TB* are all pirates (and one has a stereotypical tattoo).

Some of the “non-typical” behaviours depend on reversals of genre-conventions, such as the clever and persistent princesses in *TPBP* and *TPK*, and the prince marrying a prince in *KaK*, and being a sensitive pirate (in *TB*). Others reveal two same-sex parents/caregivers (*ATMT*, *DR*, *HhTM*, *MaMaGM*). *JiaM* and *MPB* both feature a boy who likes dressing up in “feminine” ways. *TKtmH* in NAWS shows two women holding hands (Figure 5), and a barber whose posture, hairdo, and bracelet suggest he may be gay.



Fig. 5. Father and son Jonathan bonding while they search for the lost key ring. The lively neighbourhood shows a female police-officer, an elderly lady, as well as different-gender couples – and a cat! From *The Key to my Heart* © Yossi Abulafia. Kane/Miller.



Fig. 6. The violin's case doubles as the casket for the sea-burial of Boris' dead parrot. Parrot and violin are precious for Boris and the boy, respectively. Mourning with the "family," the boy plays the violin. From *Tough Boris* © Kathryn Brown. Voyager Books.

Depiction of positive and negative physical contact at least once

Surely, the depiction of positive physical contact represents a value that most parents want to share with their children. For good measure, we also counted instances of negative physical contact.

	Awarded general books [AWS]	Non-awarded books [NAWS]	Awarded AMULIT books [AMS]
Positive physical contact involving child?	<i>DBB, Dreamers, GG, GJ, JiaM, KK, LSoMS, THGW, OCF</i>	<i>BoBB, DwD, Hurricane, LMBS, MMaM, OS, TFS, TKtmH</i>	<i>ATMT, DR, HhTM, KaK, LMBS, MaMaGM, MPB, TPK, TSD</i>
Positive physical contact not involving child?	<i>DBB, Dreamers, GJ, JiaM, KK, LSoMS, OCF, TB, WWwA</i>	<i>LMBS, OS, TFS, TKtmH</i>	<i>ATMT, DR, HhTM, MaMaGM, TPK, TSD</i>
Negative physical contact		<i>BoBB, DwD, LMBS, TFS</i>	<i>TB, TPBP, TPK</i>

Table 3. NB1. As "positive physical contact" we considered "kissing," "hugging," and "holding hands; as negative physical contact we considered "fighting," "hair-pulling," "dragging," and "pushing away." NB2. It is to be noted that there are also instances of both non-physical positive (e.g., greeting) and aggressive behaviour (e.g., pointing a fist or a finger, taunting, adopting a threatening posture, or showing disapproval (Figure 4).

Positive physical contact appears in almost all books – both between the child protagonist and a parent or other family member and between others (including parents and strangers, Figure 5). Its absence between father and son in *OCF* is significant – both father and son being somewhat eccentric – as physical intimacy is depicted between other, anonymous, persons. Examples of (the threat of) fighting and unpleasant physicality are relatively rare – and virtually absent in *AWS*. There are cases of bullying (*DBB*; *BoBB*, *MB*; *TSD*), sibling interaction (*LMBS*), fights amongst peers (*TFS*; *TB*, *TPK*), or across-gender confrontation (*DwD*, *TPBP*).

Locations of depicted events

The family “home” ideally constitutes a safe space for children. Learning to negotiate a wider world entails visits to specific public buildings as well as experiencing both the excitement and potential dangers of open-air public space.

	Awarded general books [AWS]	Non-awarded books [NAWS]	Awarded AMULIT books [AMS]
Inside (grand)parental home (incl. garden)?	<i>DBB</i> , <i>GG</i> , <i>GJ</i> , <i>JiaM</i> , <i>KK</i> , <i>OCF</i> , <i>THGW</i> , <i>WWwA</i>	<i>BoBB</i> , <i>DwD</i> , <i>Hurricane</i> , <i>IaNS</i> , <i>LMBS</i> , <i>MB</i> , <i>MMaM</i> , <i>OS</i> , <i>TFS</i> , <i>TKtmH</i>	<i>ATMT</i> , <i>DR</i> , <i>HhTM</i> , <i>KaK</i> , <i>MaMaGM</i> , <i>MPB</i> , <i>TPBP</i> , <i>TPK</i> , <i>TSD</i>
In or in front of public buildings (including public transport)?	<i>DBB</i> , <i>Dreamers</i> , <i>GJ</i> , <i>JiaM</i> , <i>KK</i> , <i>LSoMS</i> , <i>OCF</i> , <i>WWwA</i>	<i>LMBS</i> , <i>MB</i> , <i>OS</i> , <i>TFS</i> , <i>TKtmH</i>	<i>DR</i> , <i>HhTM</i> , <i>KaK</i> , <i>MPB</i> , <i>TSD</i>
In open-air public space?	<i>DBB</i> , <i>Dreamers</i> , <i>GJ</i> , <i>JiaM</i> , <i>KK</i> , <i>LSoMS</i> , <i>OCF</i> , <i>WWwA</i>	<i>BoBB</i> , <i>DwD</i> , <i>LMBS</i> , <i>MB</i> , <i>TFS</i> , <i>TKtmH</i>	<i>ATMT</i> , <i>DR</i> , <i>HhTM</i> , <i>KaK</i> , <i>MaMaGM</i> , <i>MPB</i> , <i>TB</i> , <i>TPBP</i> , <i>TPK</i> , <i>TSD</i>

Table 4. NB1. Strictly speaking the gardens depicted in *BoBB* and *Hurricane* are the neighbour’s. NB2. We have taken the garden in *GG* to be the great-grandfather’s, but it could also be a public park. NB3. The zoo was considered the “home” of the penguins and “open-air public space” for the visitors in *ATMT*.

Interestingly, most stories in AWS take place exclusively or predominantly at the grandparent(s)' homes (*DBB*, *GJ*, *JiaM*, *THGW*, *WWwA*), with a few exceptions located in parental homes (*KK*, *OCF*). These are safe spaces in which children can explore and develop their identity. In NAWS we find more cases of stories developed in the context of the parental homes (*BoBB*, *Hurricane*, *IaNS*). But the grandparents are key figures in *MMaM*, *OS*, and *TFS*, where the children see them as role models and/or spend quality time with them.

Scenes in public buildings in AWS and AMS are positively linked to social work and community awareness (*LSoMS*), as well as personal development and learning at the school (*DBB*; *HhTM*, *MPB*, *TSD*), the library (*Dreamers*, *OCF*), the swimming pool (*JiaM*), the office (*KK*), or the zoo (*OCF*). A telling exception is *WWwA*, in which the school is a prison symbolizing the suppression of Cree identity in Canada. In NAWS, public buildings appear less frequently. An exception is *TFS*: although the school is here a source of anxiety and peer pressure, it is also a trigger for the child to discover an unknown side of his grandfather.

As for “open-air public space” in AWS, it is sometimes depicted as challenging due to its foreignness (*Dreamers*, *GG*, *GJ*; *TFS*) or exemplifying otherness (*DBB*). In *JiaM*, the city and its diverse community are supportive sources of inspiration. Notably, there are also visual references to a wider world in the form of maps, iconic buildings/people, and globes (*Dreamers*, *OCF*, *THGW*; *IaNS*, *MB*; *HhTM*, *TB*). *TKtmH* shows the family's relations with people in the neighbourhood. Nature tends to be a safe space, encouraging identity-building and symbolizing freedom. In *MB* and *MPB* visual clues to identify specific locations seem to be deliberately suppressed.

Depicted or suggested activities by the protagonist child and others in the family

Children's books also show what are activities worth spending time on. In this section we chart specifically to what extent the active or passive enjoyment of art and sports is depicted, and how much attention is paid to imagining, dreaming, and fantasizing.

	Awarded general books [AWS]	Non-awarded books [NAWS]	Awarded AMULIT books [AMS]
Child (about to start) reading/writing?	<i>Dreamers, JiaM, KK, LSoMS, OCF</i>	<i>BoBB, LMBS, MB, OS, TFS</i>	<i>DR, HhTM</i>
Child making music/drawing/painting/dancing/performing?	<i>DBB, JiaM, THGW</i>	<i>BoBB, IaNS, LMBS, MB, OS, TFS</i>	<i>DR, HhTM, MPB, TB, TSD</i>
Books, art, musical instruments/performance depicted?	<i>DBB, Dreamers, KK, LSoMS, OCF, THGW</i>	<i>BoBB, Hurricane, IaNS, LMBS, MB, OS, TFS, TKtmH</i>	<i>ATMT, DR, HhTM, KaK, MaMaGM, TB, TSD</i>
Competitive sports or metonymies suggesting interest in these?	<i>Dreamers, KK</i>	<i>BoBB, IaNS, LMBS, MB, MMaM, TFS, TKtmH</i>	<i>DR, HhTM, MPB, TSD, TPBP, TPK</i>
Photographs/portraits/drawings of family (made by child or featuring at home)?	<i>GJ, OCF, THGW</i>	<i>DwD, IaNS, OS, TFS</i>	<i>KaK, HhTM, TSD</i>
Imaginative game/imagination?	<i>Dreamers, GG, JiAM, LSoMS, THGW, WWwA</i>	<i>BoBB DwD, Hurricane, IaNS, MB, OS, TFS</i>	

Table 5. NB1 the children in *TSD* (Figure 4) and *MPB* emphatically do *not* like competitive sports.

Books are particularly important, as they are sources of imagination and knowledge for children. Indeed books, read by the protagonist and others, and/or in bookcases and/or lying on tables, are abundantly present. Often, we see art on the walls in the home. But art is represented also by depicting the hero or another character playing music, dancing, performing, drawing, and/or painting. An interest in competitive sport (less present in AWS) is pictorially suggested either in action (rugby in *BoBB*; football in *TKtmH*, *MB*; baseball in *HhTM*), or via metonymies of sports attributes: a baseball (or related equipment) (*Dreamers*,

KK; BoBB; MPB), a basketball (*KK; BoBB, IaNS*), a boxing glove (*KK*), a football (*LMBS*), and golf clubs (*MMaM*). Many other activities are depicted or suggested, such as cooking and eating (*OS, THGW; DR, HhTM, TSD*), working in the garden (*GG, THGW, WWwA; DR*), knitting and sewing (*Dreamers, LSoMS*), rowing (*GJ; DR*), cycling (*THGW, OCF; BoBB*), dressing up and disguising (*OS; HhTM, MPB, TSD*), and story-telling (*OS; BoBB, DwD*).

Positive fantasies, dreams, and/or imagined activities are notably absent in AMS. Perhaps the AMS' focus on promoting gender-related issues comes at the expense of devoting attention to these activities?

Depiction of real/imagined/toy animals

Young children often have toy/stuffed animals to comfort them, while pet animals may be part of the family. Other types of animals (on the street, in zoos) are part of the outside world the child will have to negotiate.

	Awarded general books [AWS]	Non-awarded books [NAWS]	Awarded AMULIT books [AMS]
Animal pet depicted?	<i>GJ, WWwA</i>	<i>Hurricane, OS, TFS, TKtmH</i>	<i>DR, HhTM, KaK, MaMaGM, TB, TPK,</i>
Stuffed/toy pet of child depicted?	<i>Dreamers, OCF</i>	<i>LMBS, MMaM</i>	<i>DR, HhTM,</i>
Other animals depicted?	<i>DBB, Dreamers, GG, GJ, JiaM, KK, LSoMS, OCF, THGW, WWwA</i>	<i>BoBB, DwD, Hurricane, IaNS, MB, OS, TFS, TKtmH</i>	<i>ATMT, DR, HhTM, KaK, MaMaGM MPB, TB, TPBP, TPK, TSD</i>

Table 6. Figures 1-5 and 8 depict various (pet) animals.

Each of the thirty picture books features at least one animal. Many books depict a pet – a cat and/or a dog (and a lizard in *BoBB*; a parrot in *TB*) as part of the family. Some pets are named (*Hurricane; HhTM*). Sometimes children bring with them toy pets that represent their own culture (the llama in *Dreamers*), function as their close companions (*OCF; LMBS, MMaM* Figure 1], or echo their care-takers' professions ("Dr. P" in *HhTM*). Animals are also depicted in drawings, photographs, books, lamps, sculptures, mobile toys, and pajamas (*OCF; IaNS,*

MMaM; DR, HhTM, KaK, MaMGM). *HhTM* is especially noteworthy as several school children draw pets when portraying their families.

Most often depictions of “other animals” are neutral. Exceptions may be the many (flying) birds and butterflies depicted, possibly symbolizing generic “freedom.” *DBB, OCF; OS, TKtmH; KaK, TPBP* are unusual in containing scenes in which an animal shows aggressive behaviour. Also rare is humans’ aggression towards animals (the duck-hunters in *TSD*; in *TPBP* the heroine fights a mythical dragon).

Several times animals are imagined ones or appear as pictures in books or on wallpaper, functioning symbolically (*Dreamers, GG, JiaM, THGW; DwD, Hurricane, IaNS, MB*). Twice, animals themselves are the main protagonists in the storyline (*ATMT, TSD*, by the same illustrator and specifically addressing gender). In both *NAWS* and *AMS* we noticed scenes of intimacy in a triangle composition made up of one parental figure, the child, and the pet (*TKtmH; DR, HhTM*).

Other issues worth further consideration

In this section we briefly mention, and speculate about, the potential significance of yet other things that caught our attention. All of these provide topics for systematic examination in future research.

Virtually all of the books depict “windows.” Given that many of the books portray families at home, this makes sense. But since windows constitute transparent borders between “inside” and “outside,” they often also carry symbolical meaning. Several times the child protagonist, or another character, watches the outside world through a window, in both its potentially exciting and threatening dimensions, from the safety of the (grand)parental home. We found one case of a child longingly looking through a window searching for freedom from a

“prison” (*WWwA*), for an absent father (*KK*), and of an adult for a former home country (*GJ*). Likewise, Hannibal, the cat in *Hurricane*, wishfully looks through a window seeing the storm as an ocean full of fishes. The “magic window” works in both directions in *THGW*: to encounter the smiling faces of grandparents and to visualize a rich and mysterious outside world. A window frees Nic’s music in *DBB*, changing his opponents’ attitude from jeering to admiration; lets the outside air in to curl the curtains that are Julián’s mermaid tail in *JiaM*; and allows the boy to look into the intimacy of Tough Boris’ chamber and his desired violin (*TB*). On some other occasions, the reader is positioned outdoors in the unwelcoming environment of a night storm or a rainy day and notices the lighted windows and warmth inside the house (*Hurricane*; *HhTM*). Doors, particularly front doors, are also regularly depicted, sometimes emphatically as “borders” between “inside” and “outside” (*KK*; *DR*, *TPBP*). In *KaK* the prospective spouses of the prince enter the castle through a door framed between portraits of the king and his mother. Julián reveals his identity to his “abuela” at her home’s door steps. The key which is lost in *TKtmH* locks the father and son outside of the parental home while the father’s feelings are suggested by a key/door metaphor.

Mirrors. In relation to the expression of identity, mirrors sometimes play a key role: on the front cover of *JiaM*, the reflection of the child in the mirror already shows his alter ego as a mermaid; in *KK* a mirror shows the son’s younger self facing the reader, as he enters the empty bedroom, and as he knots his father’s tie in an illustration that merges various selves. Mirrors are also strategic instruments to convey meaning that the viewer (but not yet the protagonist) can see (*Hurricane*, *MMaM*). It is also worth checking mirror-like juxtapositions (Figure 1).

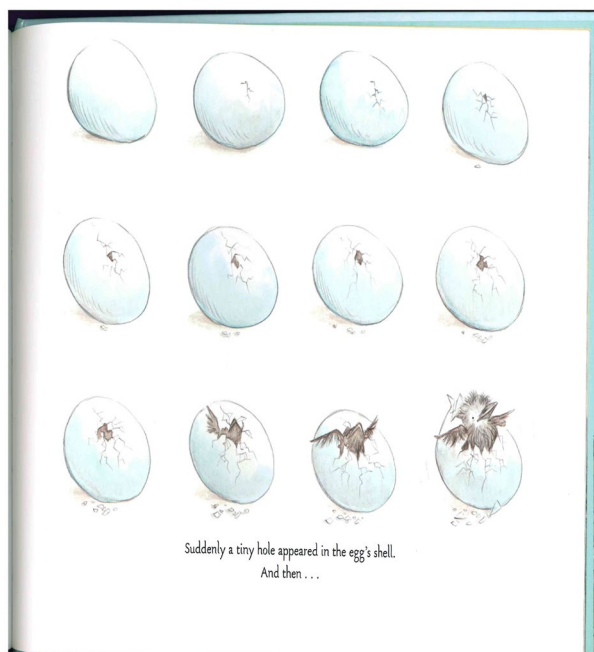


Fig. 7. A “slowing down” sequence of Tango’s birth, ending in a triumphant “demand look.” The reader is invited to share Roy and Silo’s happiness about their long awaited child. From *And Tango Makes Three* © Henry Cole. Simon and Schuster.



Fig. 8. The treasured long black hair of “Nókom” is metaphorized as bird wings, connoting freedom. The Cree “ta maskisiyin” exemplifies code-switching. From *When we were Alone* © Julie Flett. Highwater.

Demand looks are relatively rare. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006: 118) call people’s gazes at an (imaginary) viewer a “demand look,” creating a form of direct address as well as inviting the viewer to “do something.” Most characters, as Hermawan and Sukyadi (2017) find, either look at objects or events, or at each other. Demand looks thus stand out. As Kress and Van Leeuwen suggest, demand looks may invite a variety of responses from viewers. They can communicate self-confidence (in *DBB*, *JiaM*; *TKtmH*; *ATMT*), sadness and despair (in *KK*; *TSD*), confusion (*LMBS*; *TSD*), fear (*MMaM*), narcissist self-centeredness (both the dragon and prince Ronald in *TPBP*), and happiness (*MaMaGM*), inviting engagement by the reader (*Dreamers*, *GG*, *OCF*, *WWwA*; *BoBB*, *TFS*; *ATMT* [Figure 7], *DR*, *KaK*) – although admittedly it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between emotions, while they moreover may be combined (see Stamenković et al. 2018). In *LSoMS*; *Hurricane*, *OS*, *TFS*, it is *pets*

that manifest a demand look. Notably, several picture books contain “photographs” or drawings of people, and these typically look at the viewer (*GJ; BoBB, DwD, MB; HhTM*) – but it is a matter for debate whether these qualify as demand looks. We also noticed that quite often non-sleeping characters are depicted with closed eyes. Usually, closed eyes signal a moment of intense concentration or emotion: while practicing or enjoying art (*DBB, LSoMS; MB; ATMT, DR, KaK, HhTM*), hugging, kissing (*KK, THGW; LMBS, MMaM, TKtmH; ATMT, DR, HhTM, TSD*), hatching an egg (*ATMT*), (enjoying) playing, watching a game or doing house chores/cooking (*BoBB; DR, HhTM, TSD*), grieving (*TB*), crying (*LMBS*), laughing and happiness, contentedness, cheering, toasting (*BoBB, LMBS, MMaM; DR, HhTM; KaK, TPK, TSD*), parental pride in the child (*HhTM, TSD*), arguing or expressing anger (*DR*), or feeling self-confident (*BoBB, LMBS; TSD*). Amongst these, the ones we found most meaningful were those in which the character faces the reader with closed or downcast eyes in an otherwise demand look: (*DBB; BoBB, LMBS*).

Foregrounded elements in the written text. Although in our analyses we concentrated on the pictures, we observed several elements in the written text that are worthy of more sustained examination. For one thing, several books emphatically draw on repeated phrases, thereby bestowing formal intra-textual cohesion that enhances an arguably pleasant, poetry-like rhythm, while at the same time foregrounding semantic connections between lexical variants in such parallel structures (see Short 1996: 63-68) (*MB, TKtmH; ATMT, TB*). For another, several books exemplify a form of verbal “code-switching” in having words or even entire sentences, in a language other than English (*Dreamers, JiaM, WWwA* [Figure 8]; *OS, TFS* [Figure 2]; *KaK*). Thirdly, we often found onomatopoeia stands out in terms of font types and sizes, deviant direction (e.g., a “wave” pattern), and/or colouring – a phenomenon familiar from comics (see Forceville et al. 2014) (*LMBS, MMaM; ATMT, KaK*).

Pervasiveness of the JOURNEY metaphor. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), human beings systematically conceive of complex, abstracts concepts in terms of more concrete, embodied concepts. Possibly the most important metaphor to conceptualize PURPOSEFUL ACTIVITY is JOURNEY (for discussion, see Forceville and Jeulink 2011). In our corpus, many books depict “journeys” – that is, movement toward a destination. Often these literal journeys also function metaphorically as aspirations towards desired identities, imagined future success, and other achievements. Examples can be found in *DBB*, *Dreamers*, *GG*, *GJ*, *JiaM*, *KK*, *LSoMS*; *BoBBB*, *Hurricane*; *TPBP*, *TPK*.

Creative pictorial/visual metaphor. Apart from the JOURNEY metaphor, the books also feature creative (or: novel) metaphors in the sense of Black (1979), as examined by Forceville (1996), Romero and Soria (2016), and Calvo-Maturana (2020). Examples include FAMILY TREE IS FIGUS (*GG*), VIOLIN CASE IS TREASURY/CASKET (*TB*, Figure 6), PARROT IS VIOLIN, and VIOLIN BOW IS SWORD (*TB*), reinforcing themes of belonging and loss, respectively. Birds are explicitly used metaphorically in BOOK LEAVES ARE BIRD WINGS (*Dreamers*) and NANA’S HAIR IS BIRD WINGS (*WWwA*, Figure 8).

Intratextual visual cohesion. Grammatical and lexical cohesive devices or (strategic) uses of repetition can function on the verbal level (Toolan 1998: 23-45). Similarly, strategic (partial) repetitions of visual objects within a book help create cohesion (i.e., SFL’s “textual metafunction,” Kress and van Leeuwen 2006: 43). We found that instances of subtle repetitions-with-slight-differences that were *not* explicitly mentioned in the text contributed highly to our aesthetic pleasure. We appreciated, for instance, the “hat” (*KK*), “crown” (*KaK*, *MPB*), “backpack” (*Dreamers*), “pillowcase” (*TSD*), “slippers” (*IaNS*), “bones” and “clouds”

(*TPBP*), and “roses” (*TPK*, Figure 3) metonymies, since they contributed to cohesion while simultaneously highlighting different aspects of persons and events. We also valued the grandfather and grandson pictures with reversed protective gesture roles in *GJ*; the depicted memories in *GG*; the curtains doubling as a dress in *JiaM*; the violin case doubling as a treasure chest and a casket (*TB*); the music notation lines (*DBB*); toys anticipating the child’s adult interests (*KK*; *Hurricane*; *HhTM*); the humorous cat-mouse interactions in *KaK*; and Frank’s jar of pickled onions in *TFS* (Figure 2).

Visual intertextuality. Intertextuality can be pithily defined as “utterances/texts in relation to other utterances/texts” (Wales 2001: 220). We would argue that intertextual references help the child be aware of a wider world beyond the family, and thus are good to have in children’s picture books. Such references can pertain to (historical) persons, places, objects and events. Let us here list the visual references to art we spotted: *The Wizard of Oz* (*GG*); the Sistine Chapel and depictions of published children’s picture books (*Dreamers*); Edgar Allan Poe (*TFS*); art house films *Rashomon* and *Intermezzo* – the latter about gay love (!) (*DR*); *King Kong* (*MB*). “Sequels,” such as Jessica Love’s recent *Julián at the Wedding* (2020) and the illustrations on her website could also be considered a form of intertextuality, as can patterns across an artist oeuvre, such as Julie Flett’s meaningful depiction of birds in *WWWA* (Figure 8) and her recently published *Birdsong*.

Colour. All books are predominantly in colour. We identified three strategies in relation to colour in the stories examined. Most of all, colour contributes enormously to the books’ attractiveness. But sometimes colour is used to help identify somebody (e.g., the harnessed Sir No-Name as Violetta in *TPK*), or to create a significant similarity between two persons or creatures (Elliot and Magellan in *OCF*; the fish and the grandmother’s dress in *JiaM*,

Nókom's hair and the wings of a bird, Figure 8). Pictures that are (partially) in monochrome or in black-and-white are usually significant, for instance because they suggest something negative (*WWwA*; *BoBB*, *DwD*, *TFS*), the past (*TFS*), or a fantasy (*MB*). By contrast, in the pastel-coloured *OCF* only one picture features bright colours: when Elliott skates with his new-found friend Magellan. As for gender, the stereotypical use of pink in association to girls and blue in relation to boys is for instance merged in the clothing of Violetta (*TPK*) and reversed in *MPB*, emphatically subverting the cliché.

Slowing down actions. As Painter (2009: 53) states, following Wall (1991), slowing down “encourage[s] the child to savour the moment and imaginatively experience the protagonist's sensations.” This happens for instance in Julián's undressing and dressing (*JiaM*), Violetta's persistence to improve her knight skills (*TPK*), continuous sleeping and learning to walk (*LSBM*), Tango's birth (*ATMT*, Figure 7), dreams (*BoBB*), and Ramsay finding information via his I-phone to rescue his grandmother (*OS*).

First person and external narration. About half of the 30 books are narrated by an omniscient/external narrator (Bal 2017: 13): *DBB*, *JiaM*, *LSoMS*, *OCF*, *WWwA*; *DwD*, *Hurricane*, *MMaM*, *TKtmH*; *ATMT*, *HhTM*, *KaK*, *TPK*, *TSD*. The other half has a first-person narrator: *Dreamers*, *GG*, *GJ*, *KK*, *THGW*; *BoBB*, *IaNS*, *MB*, *OS*, *TFS*; *DR*, *MaMGM*, *MPB*, *TB*, *TPBP*. *LMBS* is ambiguous between external and first-person narration. It is worth observing that in the case of first-person narration, the narrator is not necessarily the main character in the story. Several times, for instance, grandparents play a more important role. Moreover, in *Dreamers* and *MPB* the first-person narrator is not the child protagonist, but his/her mother. Cases of unfiltered, direct speech are likewise meaningful to highlight voices and learn about the characters (Short 1996), for instance in code-switching. Interestingly,

sometimes we share a character's point of view (partly visible via his/her hands) (*Dreamers; DwD*) – see Painter (2009).

Limitations of our exploratory analysis

Although we have tried to signal potentially significant patterns, examining a mere thirty books out of many hundreds clearly does not allow for sweeping generalizations. Moreover, undoubtedly yet other dimensions than we charted or mentioned here are pertinent. One factor that we did not take into account is the ages of the targeted children of the books (though the selection mainly consisted of books for 4-8 year-olds, and always within the 2-9 years olds range; see Moya Guijarro and Ávila 2009; Moya Guijarro 2014), nor the year a book was (first) published. This latter matters since for instance the sensitivity to gender and skin-colour diversity has enormously grown in recent times. Multimodality scholars wishing to focus on cross-modal connections between visuals and written text may want to take into account whether a book's visuals and text were created by the same person or whether the labour was divided between different creators, which may relate to the question whether there are “contradictory” or “enhancing” interactions between visuals and text (Nikolajeva and Scott 2000 quoted in Sunderland 2010: 55; for more on multimodal corpus research, see Bateman et al. 2017: Chapters 5-6). Moreover, sometimes written texts provide highly salient information about a protagonist's awareness of a (new) identity. Examples of significant direct speech are “I am a Mermaid” (*JiaM*), “I am a Princess Boy” (*MPB*), “I'm cool too” (*MB*) and “He cried and cried. ...And so do I” (*TB*).

We also realized that analysing picture books via digital media was sometimes not ideal, because pages were often provided separately rather than as “spreads.” But what we regretted most of all was that we were not able to do justice to the often breath-taking aesthetics of the visuals in many of the books. This is probably inevitable, as “style” cannot

be objectively analysed in terms of the categories we delineated; however, we are fully convinced that the style of the visuals is crucially important in picture books. We can here think for instance of the collage technique in *KK* and *IaNS* – collage being highlighted as a potential vehicle to create “visual tension” (Doonan 1993: 82); the “medieval tapestry” layout in *TPK*; and the choice to depict people without facial features in *MPB*. By privileging aspects of dress, behaviour, and appearance, and downplaying facial specificity, *MPB* challenges gender stereotypicality.

Concluding remarks

Are there any possibly significant differences between the three subcorpora? Perhaps the virtual absence of grandparents in AMS can be explained by the fact that the writers wanted to spend all their “resources” on addressing gender issues, and not complicate these by introducing grandparents. That being said, evidently, in *JiaM* (which, incidentally, is part of the complete AMULIT corpus) the grandmother plays a key role as Julián’s “helper.” Hopefully, grandparents will feature more prominently in future books addressing identity issues. Also noticeable is that the child protagonists in AWS have no depicted siblings at all. Might this, similarly, be because these books thematize other diversity issues? NAWS, by contrast, emphatically depict sibling relationships. However this may be, we would argue that all three subcorpora address the idea of the “nuclear” family (often: including pets). But AWS and NAWS do so by including grandparents (and leaving open the possibility of single-parenthood, in *Dreamers* and *OCF*), while AMS does so by proposing non-typical family constellations and gender preferences.

Notably, AWS and AMS appear to feature more diversity in terms of skin-colour and other dimensions than NAWS. But twice an “opponent” (Greimas, quoted in Bal 2017:170) of a coloured main character is depicted as white-skinned (a policeman in *Dreamers* and a

person cutting the treasured long hair of the grandmother-as-child in *WWWwA*). Conforming to stereotypes, aggressive behaviour is primarily associated with male and “masculine” behaviour, as are competitive sports. By contrast, an interest in art might be slightly more strongly associated with stereotypical feminine than with boys’ behaviour. Further testing whether our preliminary findings, as well as any correlations between them, are statistically significant, is crucial – but this will require analysis of much larger corpora.

It is worth mentioning that we found that no less than 20 out of 38 books in the complete AMULIT corpus were not currently included in the IYL (Children’s Library) Catalogue at all. Moreover, only *one* of the books from this corpus (*JiaM*) surfaced in the 1,235 books in our list when the filter “family” was used. The categorizations used might therefore sometimes be misleading or incomplete. For instance, *TB* was only labelled under “pirates,” while for instance *HhTM* was categorized under various labels – but *not* under “family.” Other books in this Catalogue did not have any keywords (e.g., *ATMT*, *DR*, *TPBP*), which makes them unfindable for potentially interested readers.

Finally, children’s picture books are complex cultural discourses. There are presumably no general criteria by which to judge their (lack of) quality – although that, of course, is precisely the task of juries called upon to award prizes ... As indicated above, an illustrator’s idiosyncratic visual style undoubtedly plays a key role in this. Moreover, a picture book may have a specific goal, such as providing a role model for a child facing a new or unusual situation (having two mothers or fathers, searching for one’s sexual identity, needing to deal with older brothers, or being intimidated by the prospect of a sleepover) – and be successful. That being said, we realized that the books both of us enjoyed most were the ones that were visually rich (which could be called “*visual density*,” as a mode-specific instance of Carter and Nash’s (1990) “*semantic density*” and “*discourse patterning*” as markers of literary language in the following ways: (1) they abundantly featured art and artistic activities as a

means of expressing the self; (2) they showed things and events beyond what was narrated in the verbal text, often leaving room for the reader/viewer's interpretation as to whys and hows; and/or (3) they featured intratextuality by repeatedly showing the same person, animal, thing, or event – but each time highlighting a new, or different aspect of it than before. In short, our favourite books were the ones that most triggered the reader/viewer's imagination. As our analyses have shown, a book's address of a specific issue (whether gender-related or otherwise) does in no way need to detract from the visual density that is so aesthetically pleasing. Indeed we believe that visual density strengthens the meaningful, non-stereotypical, and inclusive depiction of families and the self.

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