

Literary Inequality:
Indications and Implications of Gender Disparities in High School Literature

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The ongoing concern about the ways in which schools fail boys has created a new discourse centering on girls' scholarly success (Ringrose 2007). This shift has rendered invisible the ways in which aspects of gender inequality still have a detrimental effect on girls, devaluing research that focuses on uncovering the ways in which inequality still occurs and continues to be reproduced in educational institutions (Pomerantz, Raby, and Stefanik 2009). If gender inequity in education is ignored, then the gendered ways in which students are affected by their extensive time within educational institutions is rendered invisible. This is problematic because the compounding effects of gender inequality in schools contribute to the reproduction of the unequal social structure (Risman 2004), both within and outside these institutions. The consequences of the subtle ways in which the gendered social structure is reproduced in schools are still important (Bailey 1992). Thus, it is vital to consider the ways in which this occurs.

While it is true that boys tend to struggle more in reading than do girls (Sax 2007) and attend college at lower rates (Guo 2016), men, regardless, still surpass women in numerous ways in the employment sector such as in earnings (Bidwell 2014), high-status jobs, and business ownership (Clark 2015). The inequalities experienced in adulthood are, at least in part, a function of inequalities experienced and learned throughout the schooling years (Bailey 1993). While academic performance is an obvious way to compare genders in school settings, other ways in which inequality exists can be more insidious. My research uncovers a form of gender inequality that still exists in schools and, thus, still deserves our attention.

Schools are highly gendered social institutions (Bailey 1993; Sadker, Sadker, and Zittleman 2009). This is apparent within minutes of entering any United States school. Immediately, one will notice that teachers are addressed by Mr., Ms., or Mrs. Students filter into

separate locker rooms and physical education classes. Sports teams and bathrooms are delineated by the gender binary. Students dress differently according to their gender in district-set uniforms or differing dress codes. After a few days of observation in any classroom, it will become evident that boys speak more in class and for longer durations. Girls raise their hands less and are given less time to arrive at an answer (Sadker and Sadker, 1994). Boys are praised for correct responses, while girls are complemented on their appearance (Sadker et al. 2009:74). However, another way in which gender inequality is manifested in schools is even subtler, gender differences in classroom content.

IMPORTANCE & EXTENT

Since students often enter schools without well-formulated or established identities (Stitzlein, 2008:68), educational institutions can play a powerful role in the development of who students become and, therefore, can greatly impact their lives after schooling. The years between 11 and 18 are especially distinctive in the development of masculinities and femininities (Corrigan 1991:206). Between these years, adolescents spend a significant portion of their time as students involved with educational institutions. Schools are not only responsible for transferring academic knowledge to students, but also providing a space for students to develop their gendered identities. Thus, studying gender in classroom content within the secondary school context is especially important.

Classroom content is often overlooked when considering gender inequality in education, particularly at the secondary level (Sadker, Sadker, and Zittleman, 2009). More focus has been placed on organizational aspects or classroom interactions (e.g. Howe and Abedin 2013; Sadker and Sadker 1994; Stitzlein 2008). Yet, failing to recognize the disparities within classroom

content neglects a significant component of the gendered social structure of education and the impact that this can have on the future of students.

Classroom content is also important to consider because these materials can be microcosms of society, projecting images of the larger social structure, as well as its inherent inequalities, including gender inequalities. Additionally, these versions of society are often projected as natural, undebatable truths (Sleeter and Grant 2009) and, therefore, deemed as trustworthy. Because of this, it can be difficult to recognize that course materials can serve to reproduce these inequities. Uncovering unequal gendered depictions within classroom materials is vital due to their potential influence over students.

At the K-12 level, students are not expected to be critical of the texts that they read (Stewart, Cooper, Stewart, and Friedley 2003). Rather, they are expected to absorb the information and view it as credible (Smith 1985). This credibility is compounded by the fact that these materials are given to them by authoritative adults, their teachers. Students generally are not given the opportunity to choose what they read for coursework and, thus, must trust that what they are given aligns as a model for the particular subject being studied.

Also, the works assigned to students in high school may be the only books that the students ever read. In fact, according to the National Endowment for the Arts (2002), less than half of the adult population in the United States reads literature (46.7%). Thus, for many people, the only exposure to literature that they will have comes from books that are part of a course curriculum. Additionally, since students interact with classroom content both within school and outside of school when completing homework, the effect of course content on the student can intensify beyond disparities experienced within the school and infuse into the home.

This project contributes to previous research on classroom content in multiple ways. First, since most research on literature has focused on children's books (e.g. Anderson and Hamilton 2005; Clark, Guilmain, and Saucier 2003; Gooden and Gooden 2001; Hamilton, Anderson, Broaddus and Niehaus 2006; Heintz 1987; Kortenhaus and Demarest 1993; McCabe, Fairchild, Grauerholz, Pescosolido, and Tope 2011; Tognoli, Pullen, and Lieber 1994; Turner-Bowker 1996) or textbooks (e.g. Baldwin and Baldwin 1992; Barton and Namatende Sakwa 2012; Bazler and Simonis 1992; Blumberg 2007; Delaney 2008; Kereszty 2009; Liew 2008; Lin Lu 2014; Táboas and Rey-Cao 2012; Ullah and Skelton 2013), my research provides a needed investigation by considering whether there are disparities in the full-length works that students are obliged to read at higher educational levels. Second, since all freshmen students in the United States are required to take English, this particular course is especially important to analyze.

After recognizing disparities in classroom content, the ability to make a significant change with regard to the way that the gendered social structure impacts students is possible on multiple levels. Through knowledge and conscious effort, teachers, librarians, principals, school boards, distributors, publishers, and content producers all are able to positively influence the materials that are chosen for use in the classroom.

This study is motivated by the need to expand upon previous research on the existence and implications of gender inequality and classroom content and, also, the dearth of information about literary works read by high-school students. In 1989 Arthur Applebee surveyed departmental chairs in order to analyze the authors of full-length works read in secondary schools across the United States. He found that of the top 50 works read in public schools, only 11 (22.0%) were written by women authors. However, little has been done since then to analyze gender in the novels read in high-school English classes. Rather, as I will show, research

conducted within the last 30 years on this topic generally falls into two categories: children's literature and textbooks.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON CLASSROOM CONTENT

Since Applebee's 1989 study on literary works used in secondary schools, researchers have not returned to investigate the content taught in high school literature classes. Instead scholars have focused on children's literature and textbooks. Here I review the existing literature that investigates gender and classroom content.

GENDER IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Previous research on gender in children's literature has found that characters who are women or girls are much less common in titles than characters who are men or boys (McCabe, Fairchild, Grauerholz, Pescosolido, and Tope 2011; Hamilton, Anderson, Broaddus and Young 2006; Turner-Bowker 1996; Heinz 1987). In fact, Hamilton et al. report that more than twice as many male title characters appeared compared with female title characters in their study of more than 200 Caldecott-award winning books in the 1980's and 1990's (2006). Gender disparity tends to increase when characters are gendered animals (Gooden and Gooden's 2001; McCabe et. al 2011).

When considering the illustrations within children's picture books, male characters tend to be much more prevalent than female characters (Gooden and Gooden 2001). Interestingly, this gap was even wider with characters shown alone. Male characters were shown by themselves much more frequently than female characters, asserting masculine strength and independence (Gooden and Gooden 2001). In addition, male characters are often portrayed

outdoors, while their female counterparts are frequently inside (Hamilton et al. 2006), often at home (Tognoli et al. 1994). Female characters are also frequently depicted as serving others (Stewart et al. 2003).

The relationship between author gender and protagonist gender has been studied with mixed results. Tognoli et al. (1994), for example, found that while men authors and male protagonists dominated the field before 1980, when women authors surpassed men in the number of children's books written, there was not a statistically significant change in the gender of the protagonists. Similarly, Hamilton et al. found that although men tend to write more books about male protagonist than female protagonists, women do not give a significant preference to one gender in their writing. Therefore, there has been no significant correlation found with regard to women writing books with female protagonists. Thus, it is clear that female authors often feature male protagonists in their work. According to novelist Sally Koslow, this is because it is easier for women to write about male protagonists since they grow up reading works by male authors (Willens 2013). This could also be because they are typically drawing on a traditional gender frame which considers men to be more important or interesting than women or, perhaps, basing their work on favorite works they, themselves, read as children. Additionally, authors may perceive that their works will sell better with masculine protagonists since it is widely presumed that boys will not read books about girls (Lesesne 2006, Dutro 2001, Yabroff 2016, Barack 2015).

GENDER IN TEXTBOOKS

School textbooks are another aspect of the curriculum content of classrooms that have been given quite a bit of scholarly attention. Gender bias has been found in all types of

textbooks, which are defined as manuals of instruction utilized, generally, as the main course of study for a particular subject. Gender inequity has been found regardless of grade level or subject. These gender disparities align well with those found in children's literature. As in children's literature, inequalities have been found with regard to frequency, roles, illustrations, and achievements. Although this project is focused within the United States context, it is worth noting that recent studies have found gender inequality within textbooks in many countries such as Pakistan (Ullah and Skelton 2013), Uganda (Barton and Namatende Sakwa 2012), Spain (Táboas-Pais, Rey-Cao 2012), Hungary (Kereszty 2009), China, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan (Lin Lu 2014).

As in children's books, masculine figures tend to appear more frequently in content and pictures within textbooks across all disciplines. One study of chemistry textbooks found that men and boys were shown three times as often as women and girls (Bazler and Simonis 1991). Another study of literature textbooks used in the second through sixth grade found that 75 percent of the characters were men or boys (Liew 2008). Even sociology textbooks reveal sharp gender biases. One study of introductory textbooks used in high schools and colleges found that women were shown alone in only 19 percent of pictures while men were pictured by themselves in 44 percent of the images. Photographs of women were mostly absent from the politics sections of the textbooks and prevalent in chapters on the family (Spade 2001).

FRAMING WITHIN GENDER AS A SOCIAL STRUCTURE

This project centers theoretically around Barbara Risman's theory of gender as a social structure (2004) and Cecilia Ridgeway's framing theory (2009). Risman argues that gender must be considered as a social structure. She builds on Anthony Giddens's structuration theory

by espousing the importance of not thinking in terms of either agency OR structure, but rather both agency AND structure. This leads to, a structured agency, wherein individuals are confined, in part, by the internalized gender frames they have learned. These internalized gender frames are a result of gender framing (Ridgeway 2004) which can be defined broadly as the way in which gender controls social behavior and organizes relationships. For framing to function and persist, there must be shared knowledge sustained by all actors within any given society. Only then can individuals behave appropriately. This common knowledge, defined, as “cultural knowledge that we assume we all know” (Ridgeway 2009) is at the foundation of the framing process. People are only able to act within the confines of what this common knowledge has enabled them to consider. Framing functions and persists within each of the three levels of gender as a social structure: 1) individual, 2) interactional/cultural, and 3) institutional. The ways in which this occurs can explain why book choices that are made in schools are based on gender, when they should be gender equal.

The individual level of Risman’s theory of gender as a social structure focuses on the processes of the development of the gendered self (Risman 2004:433). The social processes within this framework include constructing a gendered identity, socialization, and internalization (Risman 2004:43). This level also includes individual thoughts regarding gender and biases. Individual thoughts and feelings regarding gender can influence book choices that are made for classrooms due to biases which consider male figures to be more interesting and/or the work of men to be more valuable. This can lead to an influx of male protagonists and authors.

The interactional/cultural level focuses on the gendered interactions that individuals have face-to-face or with objects. This level is often concerned with the social processes of group inclusion (Risman 2004:436-437). Different cultural expectations, based on gender, are also a

large part of this dimension, whereby women and men are expected to behave differently in interactions even when they are situated in identical positions within the social structure (Risman 2004:433). While we often think of interactions as those which occur face-to-face, interactions can also occur between people and objects. When individuals continually interact with books written by men and those with male protagonists, this becomes the norm. This normalcy of male protagonists and authors can repeatedly influence the book decisions which are made over time.

The institutional level of Risman's theory of gender as a social structure centers on law, formal regulations, and organizational practices (Risman 2004:436-437). This can be conceived as specific institutions, geographic areas, or larger social spheres. This is the highest level of the gendered social structure and is relevant in this context when considering individual schools or education more broadly (Risman 2004:436-437). Although schools are often viewed as gender-neutral meritocracies, gender inequality in schools can be strongly reproduced and reinforced in multiple ways, even when official rules mandate gender equality (Risman 2004:436, Schilt 2010:132-133). The institutional level of gender as a social structure is important here because this is where curriculum suggestions or decisions can be made. Additionally, school in-services and trainings at this level have the potential to impact the content decisions that teachers make. Therefore, changes in books used in individual classrooms can be influenced through both top-down institutional impacts or bottom-up individual decisions by teachers, especially since the freedom to choose books in public schools varies from district to district (Foss 2011; Cohn, Elias, and Holloway 2016).

If our shared knowledge of gender privileges the masculine perspective, then it makes sense that books that are chosen for use in school privileges the words and actions of men. Since it is assumed that we all know this piece cultural knowledge (Ridgeway 2009), the decision to

question or scrutinize the choices made in schools which are indeed inequitable rarely occurs. This paper is important because it does this through an analysis of gender in full-length works read in schools, when this is something taken for granted. It questions the normalcy of the male perspective and appeals for change.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS & HYPOTHESES

My first research question asks if there is a gender disparity in authors read in freshman English classes. This question is motivated by the fact that extant research, as described above, has shown that a great disparity exists with regard to the protagonists that students are exposed to in children's books and textbooks. However, we do not know much about the literary authors that students read in high school today. While previous research finds that women currently produce more children's books than men (Tognoli et al. 1994), research has not investigated adolescents' experience with literature. I ask if there are significantly more male authors read by high school freshman compared with female authors. According to Ridgeway (2009), we would expect for the gender frame which esteems work written by men more than women to operate in schools. Therefore, *I hypothesize that more male authors are read than female authors.*

My second research question asks if there is a gender disparity in protagonists within works read for freshmen English classes. Specifically, are there significantly more male protagonists than female protagonists in the assigned literature, similar to that found in research on textbooks and children's books. If more male protagonists are found in high school literature, then this also aligns with gender framing which values men as key societal actors and women in supporting roles. *I hypothesize that more male protagonists than female protagonists will be found in the literary works assigned to students.*

My third research question asks if there is a correlation between author gender and protagonist gender. Although research on this aspect has been relatively inconclusive (i.e. Tognoli et al. 1994; Hamilton et al. 1994). Gender as a social structure at the individual level (Risman 2004) utilizes gender framing (Ridgeway 2009) which constructs men and women as complete opposites (Lorber 1993). Because of this, men and women should be more inclined to write novels that reflect what they know, not something that is the complete opposite. Therefore, *I hypothesize that there will be a correlation between the gender of the author and the gender of the protagonist.*

DATA & METHODS

My units of analysis are major full-length works assigned in United States public high schools. Major works are defined as any work longer than a short story, fiction or nonfiction. Some popular works from my study include novels, epic poems, and plays such as *Of Mice and Men*, *The Odyssey*, and *Romeo and Juliet*.

In order to assess the literary works assigned in current freshman English classes, I located two current syllabi for such courses for each U.S. state and one for Washington D.C. The two syllabi from each state were drawn from separate schools and cities within the state. I chose the syllabi by conducting Google searches with particular key words such as “English 9 syllabus”, “Freshman English syllabus,” etc. Major full-length works were then drawn from the 101 syllabi from these 101 distinct public schools within the United States. The total number of assigned works that I found in these syllabi is 423. Each syllabus was from a freshman-level English course, utilized during the 2015-2016 or 2016-2017 school year. The data collection process spanned from May 2016 through August 2016.

The first one hundred and one syllabi elicited from Google searches that met the stipulated year, course, state, and district requirements were utilized. I pulled syllabi in order from Google searches until reaching the last page of the search results. Only then did I modify the search terms (e.g., changing the search terms from “English 9 syllabus” to “freshman English syllabus”).

Given that I sampled only two syllabi from each state within the United States, when I encountered a third syllabus from a single state, I skipped that syllabus and moved to the next. If I encountered a syllabus from the same city, town, or school district as previously gathered for that state, I skipped this syllabus and did not include it in my data. My reason for not allowing duplicate syllabi in the same district is because school districts sometimes have curriculum directors or suggested reading lists that dictate what is taught in classes.

Method of Analysis

From each syllabus (N=101), I extracted the titles of the texts assigned on these syllabi. I did not include any textbooks in my data. I coded from the literary works or syllabi protagonist gender, protagonist species, number of protagonists, school district, school name, city, state, author gender, and teacher gender. Each assigned work, then, is considered a case (N=423).

I define protagonist as the main character, or the person that is most involved in the action of the book. The protagonist is at the center of what occurs. Some works contain two protagonists such as *Romeo and Juliet*, others contain only one such as *The Odyssey*, and some nonfiction works such as *Chew on This* have no protagonist. The main character was determined through my understanding of the books. Many of the books on this list, I had already read due to the fact that I have always been a voracious reader and, as a former school librarian and high

school teacher, I worked to read the books that my students were reading so that I could connect with them and link cross-curricular concepts into my classroom. Furthermore, I obtained my license as a media specialist through the Praxis 2 test which required a deep understanding of books frequently assigned in schools. However, with works that I was unfamiliar with, I either read the book or multiple summaries to determine the main actor. I also checked summaries to verify my understanding of works that I had already read. I did not use titles to determine the book's protagonist, as many other researchers have done (e.g. McCabe et al. 2011; Hamilton, et al. 2006; Turner-Bowker 1996; Heinz 1987).

My analyses consider the gendered attributes of these literary texts that students encounter. My first analysis compares male and female protagonist counts in order to consider whether there is a gender disparity in protagonists in works read. I analyze both texts with only a male or female protagonist as well as those with two central characters, such as *Romeo and Juliet*. Odds and odds ratios are calculated in order to capture the likelihood of students experiencing male and female authors and protagonists. My second analysis considers the gender of the author and if more male authors are read than female authors. Yates chi-square tests are utilized to measure statistical significance in these comparisons. My third analysis compares author gender with protagonist gender. I utilize binomial logistic regression to examine these relationships. The dependent variable is protagonist gender and the independent variable is author gender.

RESULTS

Results show that students read significantly more texts with male protagonists than with female protagonists. Table 1 presents the protagonist gender odds. The first column considers

all works assigned (N=423). The odds of being assigned a book with a sole female protagonist are 0.251 and the odds of a student being exposed to a book with a male sole protagonist are 1.376 (see Table 1, column 1). The odds of being assigned a book with both a male and female protagonist are 0.248. The odds of being assigned a book with no protagonist are 0.019. The odds ratio of a student being exposed to a male protagonist compared to a female protagonist is 5.473. That is, students have about five and a half greater the likelihood of being assigned a book with a male protagonist in their high school freshman English course than being assigned one with a female protagonist.

Table 1: Odds of Protagonist Gender

	All works N= 423	Only works with a sole protagonist N=331
Feminine sole protagonist	0.251	0.351
Masculine sole protagonist	1.376	2.848
Masculine and feminine protagonist*	0.248	
No protagonist	0.019	
Odds ratio for masculine protagonist	5.473	8.116
Pearson chi-squared	127.19	152.76
p- value	<.0001	<.0001

*Frequently William Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet

Table 1, column two, shows the results obtained from considering the works with a sole protagonist alone (N=331). The odds of being assigned a text with a sole protagonist who is a woman or girl is 0.351. The odds of being assigned a text with a sole protagonist who is a man or boy is 2.848. The odds ratio of a student being exposed to a male sole protagonist compared

to a female protagonist is 8.116. Therefore, when considering only works with a single protagonist, first-year high school students are over eight times more likely to be assigned a work of literature with a male protagonist than one with a female protagonist.

Author gender tells a similar, yet more extreme, story (Table 2). The odds of being assigned a work with a male author are 3.22, whereby the odds of being assigned a work written in a high school English class by a woman author are 0.311. The odds ratio, then, of a student being exposed to a male author compared to a female author is 10.368. Therefore, students are more than ten times more likely to be assigned a literary work written by a man than one written by a woman.

Table 2: Odds of Author Gender

	N=423
Man author	3.22
Woman author	0.311
Odds ratio	10.3684
Pearson's chi square	233.57
p-value	<.0001

Table 3 presents the results from binomial logistic regression of the relationship between author gender and female protagonists in works of literature read in high school English classes. I include only literary works with a single protagonist in this analysis (N=331). The results show that the author effect on protagonist gender is 4.774 with a standard error of 0.461. This effect is significant at the .001 level. The odds ratio of this effect is 118.380. Thus, being assigned to read a female author increases the odds of a student being exposed to a female protagonist by a factor of 118.380.

Finally, comparing my study and Arthur Applebee’s 1989 study shows that there is no statistically significant change between the gender of the authors that students are reading today and those that they read almost 30 years ago. Applebee found that of the top 50 works read in public schools, only 11 (22.0%) were written by women authors. The analysis of 101 current syllabi only elicited 40 works which were assigned more than one time. However, of these 40 which, given that they were assigned more than once, I deem them to be the top works, only 9 (22.5%) were written by women. A chi-square test comparing Applebee’s findings with my findings reveals a p-value of 0.86. Therefore, there is not a statistically significant difference between the gender composition of top classroom content read almost 30 years ago and that being read today.

Table 3 Students’ Exposure to Female Sole Protagonists in High School English Courses (N=331)

	Coefficients	Odds Ratio
Intercept	-3.296*** (0.481)	
Female Author	4.774*** (0.461)	118.380

***p<.001

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study reveals that there is tremendous gender inequity in the literary works that students are assigned in freshman high school English courses today. Specifically, this study finds support for my first hypothesis which predicted that students would encounter more male authors than female authors. In fact, students were more than 10 times likely to be assigned a work written by a man than written by a woman.

Beyond author gender, this study also finds that students encounter very few female protagonists, aligning with my second hypothesis. Students were more than eight times more likely to be assigned a work focusing on a man or a boy than a woman or a girl when only considering works with one protagonist and over five times more likely to encounter a male protagonist when considering all works.

This study also finds support for the third hypothesis which predicted that there would be a correlation between protagonist gender and author gender. The discovery that author gender is correlated with protagonist gender offers a clear finding on an issue that has not been well-defined with regard to children's books (Tognoli et al. 1994; Hamilton et al. 2006). This finding points to the need for future research on this topic. It also indicates that focusing on assigning students books written by equal numbers of men and women authors will likely make the protagonist ratio more equal.

When women and girls do not appear as frequently in texts as they do in reality, this leads to a symbolic annihilation of women (Gerbner and Gross 1976; Tuchman 1978). Presenting a particular group less frequently than they exist in the population, or not presenting them at all, devalues that group and their contributions (McCabe et al. 2011). When students read books and use textbooks that do not accurately represent reality, they are socialized, at the individual level of gender as a social structure to believe that certain groups are more important than others (Risman 2004). When female authors and protagonists are less visible than male figures, it leads both genders to believe that boys and men have greater societal value than girls and women, engendering a frame that gives more importance to masculine figures as well as their thoughts and actions (Ridgeway 2009). This has the potential to affect the confidence levels that girls experience, and, perhaps, can lead them to not take on leading roles at the interactional level of

gender as a social structure aligning with what they encountered in classroom texts (Risman 2004).

Our shared understandings of the gender frame are learned through socialization by others, including in educational settings. One of the most important ways this occurs is through interaction with required course materials in schools, including books assigned for courses. These books often create and reify gendered understandings of the world (Gooden and Gooden 2001). These understandings, thus, can limit not only our interactions with others, but also how we act and who we become, further impacting the individual level of gender as a social structure where the gendered self is developed (Risman 2004). We frame ourselves in accordance with this socialization, utilizing our understanding of the gender frame as a tool to develop our traits, personality, and understanding of the self (Ridgeway 2009). For example, if students see only boys as key actors within classroom content and classroom discussion centers around what these masculine figures are doing, girls begin to believe that they are not key societal actors. Additionally, if students are not interacting with words written by women, they will think that feminine voices are less important.

While my results show that substantial gender disparities still exist in classroom content today, is further research is still needed in this area. Future projects analyzing literary works read in schools should consider race, age, socioeconomic class, sexuality, disability, and other marginalized frames in light of these gendered findings. Projects should consider intersections between these other statuses and gender. This is extremely important for a comprehensive understanding of classroom content and potential effects on marginalized groups.

Additionally, recommended reading lists are also widely available for all K-12 grades. Teachers and librarians often choose books based on these lists, or are required to do so based on

state or school guidelines. Using these lists as data for future analysis could be extremely fruitful in understanding the institutional level of gender as a social structure (Risman 2004).

In order to build further on previous research, it is vital to study the content within these literary works. Exploring the roles, traits, and actions of characters from which students build their gendered expectations is vital. It is also important to consider how gender is manifested within the literature textbooks that are read in these courses to see if the gender disparities of the past are still ubiquitous in current works or have moved in a positive direction.

Persistent gender inequalities from the gender wage gap, to the second shift (Hochschild and Machung 1989/2012), to violence against women, and beyond are the result of being framed by gender (Ridgeway 2009). These gender frames and their aligning categories both shape and are shaped by the gendered social structure (Risman 2004). Recognizing ways in which gendered expectations are learned and reified over time at all levels of the gendered social structure allows for the possibility of change. For example, if one teacher becomes aware of gender disparities in classroom content, she/he may choose to assign more texts with female protagonists or those written by women authors.

Some research suggests that more egalitarian depictions of both male and female characters are on the rise (Clark, Lennon, and Morris 1993). Furthermore, the number of women and girls as central characters in children's literature has also been shown to be increasing (McCabe et al. 2011). However, these new publications will not make a significant impact unless parents, teachers, and librarians make a conscious effort to choose these books and not resort, as this research shows is commonly done, to unequal gender representations.

It is astounding that ostensibly nothing has changed with regard to high school literary works since Applebee's 1989 study. Continuing to combat the vast gender inequalities in

classroom content is clearly necessary. Childhood literature, textbooks, and major literary works assigned in high school are subtle but vital components of the socialization process which create the gendered expectations from which students will frame others and themselves. It is vital to work to change the factors that create our gender unjust social structure. After all, the future is on the line.

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The main characters — whether they're human, animal, a snowplow or a crayon — are almost always male.

APPENDIX

Title	Author	Frequency	Protagonist Gender*
<i>Romeo and Juliet</i>	William Shakespeare	82	2
<i>The Odyssey</i>	Homer	50	0
<i>To Kill A Mockingbird</i>	Harper Lee	39	1
<i>Of Mice and Men</i>	John Steinbeck	25	0
<i>Animal Farm</i>	George Orwell	24	0
<i>Night</i>	Elie Wiesel	16	0
<i>The Lord of the Flies</i>	William Golding	11	0
<i>Speak</i>	Laurie Halse Anderson	8	1
<i>A Raisin in the Sun</i>	Lorraine Hansberry	7	0
<i>Fahrenheit 451</i>	Ray Bradbury	7	0
<i>Anthem</i>	Ayn Rand	6	0
<i>The House on Mango Street</i>	Sandra Cisneros	5	1
<i>Great Expectations</i>	Charles Dickens	4	0
<i>Julius Caesar</i>	William Shakespeare	4	0
<i>Oedipus The King</i>	Sophocles	4	0
<i>The Absolutely True Diary of A Part-Time Indian</i>	Sherman Alexie	4	0
<i>A Separate Peace</i>	John Knowles	3	0
<i>The Catcher in the Rye</i>	J.D. Salinger	3	0
<i>The Miracle Worker</i>	William Gibson	3	1
<i>The Secret Life of Bees</i>	Sue Monk Kidd	3	1
<i>Things Fall Apart</i>	Chinua Achebe	3	0
<i>1984</i>	George Orwell	2	0
<i>Adventures of Huckleberry Finn</i>	Mark Twain	2	0
<i>All Quiet on the Western Front</i>	Erich Maria Remarque	2	0
<i>Antigone</i>	Sophocles	2	1
<i>Brave New World</i>	Aldous Huxley	2	0
<i>Call of the Wild</i>	Jack London	2	0
<i>Chew on This</i>	Eric Schlosser	2	N/A
<i>Ender's Game</i>	Orson Scott Card	2	0
<i>Gilgamesh</i>	Shin-Leqi-Unninni	2	0
<i>Into the Wild</i>	Jon Krakauer	2	0
<i>Maus</i>	Art Spiegelman	2	0
<i>Persepolis</i>	Marjane Satrapi	2	1
<i>The Book Thief</i>	Markus Zusak	2	1
<i>The Crucible</i>	Arthur Miller	2	0
<i>The Giver</i>	Lois Lowry	2	0
<i>The Hobbit</i>	J.R.R. Tolkien	2	0
<i>The Hunger Games</i>	Suzanne Collins	2	1
<i>The Pearl</i>	John Steinbeck	2	0
<i>Tuesdays with Morrie</i>	Mitch Albom	2	0

*0=male, 1=female, 2=both, NA=no protagonist