PROBLEMATIZING THE PROMISES OF THE AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION’S AWARDS THAT RECOGNIZE DIFFERENCE

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by
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The American Library Association presents several awards for children’s literature that represent difference. Through critical content analysis, this study examines the criteria and five recent winners of the Coretta Scott King, Pura Belpré, Schneider, and Stonewall awards, as well as the Newbery award, to understand how they represent difference. This study considers ways challenges and strengths are represented, as well as how the books represent normalcy and others who are considered different, through a theoretical framework built on Williams’ theory of a selective tradition, Lemert’s crisis, Fraser’s status model, critical theories of identity, and critical multicultural theory. By their very nature the books reify identity boundaries, but Pura Belpré winners also question the importance of those borders. Characters from many of the books desire normalcy, and that normalcy is contrasted against how other groups are represented. Normalcy is desired by these characters because it seems to afford equal status to those who are considered normal.
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Preface

I recently saw a shirtless trans man on a TV show for the very first time. The character he was meeting didn’t understand the scars on his chest, but I recognized them immediately. They represented something that I hadn’t experienced, but his voice, deeper and more confident than in the last episode we’d seen him in, was a memory of my own history. I’ve seen so many white people, so many English speakers, so many people without disabilities, on TV shows, that even though my own scholarly interests are about what representation is and does, it took that moment to realize how rarely I see reflections of my gender experience.

It was such a stunning moment that I was disoriented. I was excited but also uneasy. Every moment I witnessed could be a misstep on the part of the characters or the show itself. There could be artful wounds that were intended to heal, with ironic misunderstandings by characters that ultimately meant to help viewers understand the transman’s gender and identity in a way that the other characters do not. Or there could be clumsy wounds, by television creators attempting to shock the audience, creating distance between viewers and the transgender character. Those risks were unsettling, but they also felt worth taking.

Being transgender often serves as an acute reminder of my difference. In working to acquire hormones and other services, I was asked by more than one mental health
professional, “So, um, when did you first realize you were different?” Different is a common code word for being transgender, to the point that as a young adult, I had a hard time distinguishing between what parts of me were different because I was transgender and what parts of me were different because I was a unique human being.

Now that I am consistently interpreted as a man, I no longer feel like I am different from how I appear. But always, on further reflection, I realize that I am. My body and life experiences are not what others expect. At this point, I think that has more meaning for others than it does for me. I understand that everyone’s bodies and life experiences are unique to them and different from what anyone could expect or predict. My own differences are not particularly special or precious, and yet the differences that are related to my gender identity are the kind that currently have a great deal of cultural significance.

I moved a lot as a child and adolescent, and my interests always seemed a little out of step with my peers. The most difficult move for me was the move my mom and I made from Florida to her childhood home in Wisconsin when I was in ninth grade. I missed my friends and felt misunderstood as I entered the school and adults thought I was two years younger than I was and computer glitches and bureaucracy put me into classes I didn’t feel like I belonged. Ironically, one place where I did feel a sense of belonging was with my ninth grade English teacher.

The irony came from multiple sources. One was that I was annoyed to be assigned to his class because it wasn’t the honors class that I thought I should be in but a major source of my sense of belonging with him was in opposition to how I felt about the
rest of the class. In my mind, I was the only student who understood him or the subject at hand.

The other major source of irony was in the history that my dad had had with this very teacher. He had been my dad’s freshman English teacher as well. One of them, my dad or my teacher, told me about my dad’s first day of that class. Sleepy, cranky, bored, and I’m assuming mourning his father, my dad expressed his disapproval for the teacher and the class by putting his head down on the desk and falling asleep. I’m not sure how long it took before the teacher expressed his disapproval by quietly walking up close to my dad’s desk and slamming his hand down right next to my dad’s head, waking him up with a jolt.

They never got along.

Special Education, as we know it, didn’t exist at that time, but thinking about it, in today’s model, I’m pretty sure my dad would have been referred for some sort of Special Education services. If he was lucky, he might have qualified as twice exceptional, disabled and gifted at the same time. Unlike me he was not the kind of person who school was designed for. In my mind always the image of the brilliant tragic artist, although he had a rich sense of humor, he was also stubborn and moody, and by the end of high school, he was already struggling with the addictions that would eventually claim his life.

He played drums in a number of bands throughout my growing up. Although he was in some mostly white blues bands, his primary “claim to fame” in the town I grew up in was as the drummer for a mostly white reggae band. Toni Morrison (1992) and others
have written about the way white people take their feelings of otherness and put them on people of color, and then take elements of the culture of people of color as that badge of otherness. I wonder if that’s what was going on with my dad’s appropriation of traditionally black and African American music.

At the same time as he was experiencing more success with it than a black person in my town would have, he spent a lot of time teaching me about black and African American musicians and what he knew about black and African American culture, and he and my mom were adamant about Native American rights, teaching me to be skeptical and annoyed about Columbus Day.

One of his favorite jokes was “What is the difference between weird and eccentric?” The punchline is “Money.” Always struggling financially, my parents found kindred spirits in other people who were oppressed. But we never talked about the ways that a family who was not white or who did not speak English, but who was in a similar financial state to us would have a much trickier time than we did. We never talked about the racial segregation at my schools, and how, although I was usually the person with the lowest class status in my Florida honors and gifted classes, I shared the same skin color as all of my classmates but one, even though there was much greater diversity within the school (currently, about 30% of the school are people of color).

I’m beginning from a place of real whiteness, real monolingualism, perceived masculinity, perceived heterosexuality, perceived ability. It’s more complex than that, of course; all experiences are more complex than their convenient labels. Even as I claim those positions, I also am aware that each of these categories is an invention and none of
them are actually real—but their effects are. And I’m not going to claim objectivity because of my position. The ways that I secretly transgress those convenient labels give me a certain level of wisdom, but still not objectivity. And the ways that I appear normal, contrary to the understanding of much of the history of academia, actually work against my ability to be objective. And my dad and I, even though I’m starting with us because we are where I come from, are not the most important part of this story.

In a forthcoming chapter about diverse nonfiction classroom libraries, I mention a hypothetical multiracial boy with a learning disability. He is a reflection of most of the students I have worked with. Often quirky and funny, often serious and concerned, often much more aware than they initially appear, these children are important parts of the United States. They are mocked and degraded in both obvious and subtle ways by the media, the school system, and the laws that have constrained their families’ experiences. I had a third grade girl tell me, “Black lives do matter!” as though she was afraid I, as a white person, might disagree. A second grade boy whose family speaks Spanish didn’t seem to believe me when I showed him that a book at school could have Spanish words in it. I have seen fourth graders who struggle with reading become extremely impatient with classmates who also struggle with reading. The school I work with does not know how to competently and abundantly welcome families with same sex parents in the same ways that we welcome recent immigrants, because of the perception that both groups could be at odds with each other. How can books open up possibilities for these students, others like them, and those who seemingly have nothing in common with them? In what ways do powerful institutions such as publishing and national prizes allow for and honor
stories that promote equal status for all, including those groups who have traditionally been underrepresented and marginalized?

When I started this project, the books in this study felt like a sure foretelling of things to come, of a gentler, more expansive world on its way. Their imperfections seemed like relics of a past that was hard to leave behind but that most people probably wanted to. The 2016 election and its aftermath have shaken these beliefs. The books seem more urgent, but I am less clear about their reception. What are the experiences of people who approach these books as windows? What causes someone to fail to see the humanity of the people about and by whom these books are written, or to dismiss the books as entirely false? And more troubling and to the point of this project, in what ways do those of us who are working toward social and cultural justice celebrate books that in fact misrepresent both marginalized groups and what a just world could be?

As a child, I spent far too much time with books that I perceived as mirrors. As a teacher of elementary school students diagnosed with disabilities such as Specific Learning Disability and speech and language impairments, and who have also mostly been kids of color, often with recent immigrant experiences, it (far too) gradually dawned on me that the books that they were reading often had to be windows, rather than mirrors. While I, as a child and a teacher, felt lost trying to find books about people of color, Latinx people, or people with disabilities, I realized that my students may have also felt similarly lost. The difference was that I, as a child and as a teacher, was trying to build empathy and understanding, while they were possibly trying to just locate themselves.
I have always had a hard time choosing what books to share with my students and my daughter, and I know many other teachers and parents do as well. What books, by their very nature, replicate systems of oppression? There are books that seem clearly problematic and there are books where it is more blurry, because I am either too attached to a certain interpretation or unsure of the meaning. History lends a meaning to books that may not be immediately apparent. Where do our intersectional identities meet with the books we read to our students, who have their own intersectional identities? What stories will my now-five-year-old daughter take with her into the world, as she negotiates her understanding of difference and normalcy and where she fits?

Before starting my doctoral program, I knew about the Coretta Scott King and Newbery awards, but I had never read a Coretta Scott King award winner, and had never heard of the Pura Belpré, Schneider, or Stonewall awards. As I explored them in grad school, I wondered how a better understanding of those award-winners, as a teacher and before, could have influenced me and my students. Understanding that representation and awards are not flawless or complete, I became curious about what the winners of those awards said about the experience of being considered different, and what it meant that certain statements about difference were celebrated. This project is my attempt to find some answers. This dissertation is my attempt to use research, theory, and my understanding of difference based on my own positionality to find some answers.
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While I was deciding to pursue a doctorate, I was in touch with some academics. By and large, they all told me that this was a great time in my life to do it. With a young child, time was flexible in a particular way. Embarassingly, what I didn’t consider until I was in the thick of it, was that the majority of the people giving this advice were straight, married men. The bit about the flexibility of early childrearing that was missing from their advice, and that I didn’t adequately question, was the important role of a partner. Not that a partner is necessary for childrearing, but that to tout the ease of a certain time in a child’s life as particularly flexible, actually means to rely on another person. In other words, this dissertation could not have been written if it wasn’t for my wife, Trisha. She has rearranged her life in countless ways for my doctoral process, and she loves me anyway, and I really have no idea how to thank her enough. Our child, Dia, as well, has been patient about my academic-related absences, and has been steadfast in her enthusiastic support for this process. She claims to want to write a dissertation herself some day.

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Chapter 1

Theoretical Foundations and Project Overview

In 1965, on the heels of the work of Augusta Baker, Virginia Lacy, and Charlemae Rollins (Harris, 1993; Botelho & Rudman, 2009), Nancy Larrick noted, “Integration may be the law of the land, but most of the books children see are all white” (p. 63). Larrick’s much-cited call for increased racial diversity in children’s books is fifty years old, but the number of children’s books that represent the diversity of the United States continue to be limited. For example, of the 1,183 children’s books with human characters that the Cooperative Children’s Book Center received in 2013, only “124 of those (10.5 percent) featured a person of color” (Horning, 2014).

This lack of racial diversity in what is published for children is in, at least large part, due to the overwhelming prevalence of white women in both the publishing industry (Low, 2016) and in libraries themselves. Deahl (2016) also chalks the lack of diversity in the publishing field to unconscious bias, and Roy (2015) notes that demographics for librarians have remained fairly similar since the 1978 publication of J. R. Carter’s Multicultural Graduate Library Education which attributed the profession’s whiteness to “financial, educational, psychosocial, and cultural” barriers that Roy says are still in place (p. 1). This lack of racial diversity in children’s books is an inaccurate representation of the country’s population, which indicates a devaluing of the stories of people of color. The real diversity of ethnicity, sexual orientation, and ability are also not present in children’s books.
In 1970, five years after Larrick’s call for more people of color in children’s literature, because “no African American author or illustrator had ever been honored by the prestigious Newbery and Caldecott awards” (Smith, 2004, p. ix), the first Coretta Scott King Book Award was awarded to Lillie Patterson for *Martin Luther King, Jr.: Man of Peace*. Twenty-six years after the first Coretta Scott King Book Award, in 1996, the American Library Association presented its first Pura Belpré Award, initially a biennial award, for representations of “the Latino cultural experience” (American Library Association, 2015a). More recently, in 2004, the association developed the Schneider Family Book Award to honor books about “the disability experience” (American Library Association, 2015c) and, in 2010, it expanded its Stonewall Book Awards, honoring books about “the gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgendered experience” (American Library Association, 2014), to “add a Children and Young Adult Literature Award” (American Library Association, 2015d). Each of these awards focuses on a single identity category, which, while shedding a needed light on an underrepresented and undervalued population within children’s literature, can focus attention so much on one group that other groups, including other marginalized groups, are ignored, opening up the possibility of their misrepresentation. This focus on only one group at a time is also seen in much of the research on diverse and multicultural children’s literature (Wolf et al., 2011; Smolen & Oswald, 2011).

These awards may have influenced publishing, but it has not been enough. Recently, the call for diverse books has resounded in New York Times op-eds (Myers, C., 2014; Myers, W. D., 2014), blogs (Perez, 2014), and in a grassroots web campaign, We Need Diverse Books (We Need Diverse Books, 2015). The need is not just for books
with diverse characters, but for excellent books with diverse characters, because “with careful selection of excellent books for children and young adults, teachers and teacher educators can prepare students for creating and maintaining a better world” (Boyd et al, 2015, p. 379). In 2015, the American Library Association seemed to actively respond to that call by honoring a more racially diverse slate of books for the Newbery and Caldecott awards than in recent years (Lindsay, 2015a; Lindsay, 2015b).

**Theoretical Foundations**

The American Library Association has understood itself to promote democracy, education, and opportunity. This has primarily been through the lens of the white middle class values of its leaders and many of its members. Children’s books that it has lauded have been steeped in those middle class values, and have been part of a selective tradition that crafts culture as much as it reflects it. Cultural shifts created a crisis that demanded that the American Library Association expand its conception of what is valuable, but it has been slow to rise to the occasion. Even as the American Library Association has attempted to adequately recognize those who have traditionally been ignored, maligned, and misrepresented (including, but not limited to, African Americans, Latinx people, GLBT people, and people with disabilities), the representations that have been valued have been forged and honored within a culture shaped by the ignorance, bigotry, and misrepresentation. Each group has its own theories to understand its specific condition, but focusing on only one axis of representation opens the door to possibilities for misrepresenting others. A different, better way forward is through a critical multicultural
displacement of hierarchies and the participatory parity and equal status of all marginalized groups.

The selective tradition

Literature that is marketed for children typically presents the most sanitized and distilled versions of a culture’s ideals. Because children are considered to be innocent and literature is considered to be pedagogical, literature for children presents values that are culturally important in a way that will not sully children’s innocence.

By identifying the best of what is available for children, children’s literature awards are examples of what Williams (1977) called “the selective tradition” which defines what “literature now is and should be” (p. 123). This “intentionally selective version of a shaping past and a pre-shaped present” is “powerfully operative in the process of social and cultural definition and identification” (p. 115). Taxel (1981) describes how the selective tradition works within children’s literature, as “authors of these materials have consistently omitted, and often slandered, the points of view of social groups whose history, not coincidentally, has been marked by powerlessness and oppression” (p. 222), also stating that the selective tradition that has governed the canon of children’s literature has until recently been “racist and sexist by commission and omission” (Taxel, in Wolf et al., 2011, p. 485).

In describing the selective tradition in children’s literature, Jipson and Paley (1991) explain that teachers, “as they make their book choices - essentially ‘select’ for or against the existence of [certain] cultural values in their classrooms” (p. 148).
Traditionally, “too frequently such choices tend to disregard or exclude literary works for school study that are by and about women, people of color and ethnic background, and certain social classes in favor of books featuring predominantly white, Euro-American, male authors and subjects” (p. 148). This subtle and overt overvaluing of white, European American, male characters and authors (who are presumably also straight and nondisabled) is a problem because it is built on a history that has also held that population up as the standard by which to judge other groups. White, European American, straight, nondisabled, male characters and people have been the ideal and the standard of normalcy, not only in children’s literature, but in most of American culture(s). That group and its values need to be decentered, because it has led to cultural and economic marginalization of those who do not live up to its (often shifting) standards.

The Crisis

In 1994, Shannon described a mainstream that “view[ed] discussions of multiculturalism in children's literature as new impositions upon their students and themselves because they believe that they stand apart from culture and lead 'normal' lives” (p. 1). The following year, Lemert (1995) described a “crisis” in which “encounters with the ideas and habits of others who seem to disrespect that which one holds dear and true” (p. x) were becoming “a hard necessity” (p. x) for those “who view themselves and their local manners as normal and mainstream” (p. ix). More succinctly, he stated, “A simply singular world is now contested as one simply different and thus many” (p. xv). This crisis, which brewed from 1914 and 1990 (Lemert, 2004, p. xi), was
the uncomfortable realization that there is no “clear, assertive normal,” and “that which would have normally been considered deviant is now more uncomfortably real” (p. 209). Globalization thrust the faces and worlds of those who had often been cast as the inferior and the enemy into view of those who thought they were normal, superior, and good. The world was bigger and more multiple than it seemed and those who had considered themselves normal, innocent, and universal had to come to terms with the realization that they were not.

Lemert found the insistence of the previously ignored “that their worlds are as real, plausible, and necessary” (1995, p. xv) an important one, but resistance to what is considered different has been strong. For example, Junot Díaz describes how he felt when he saw Toni Morrison on the cover of *Time* magazine in 1998, believing “you could feel the demographic shift, you could feel in the ’90s what the future was going to be,” but “when you look at the literary world now,... it’s almost like that future was never realized. The literary world has tripled down on its whiteness” as if in “a prayer against, or an attempt to exorcise, that imminent future” (quoted in Ghansah, 2015). Whiteness has continued to assert its power, in subtle ways, and in more direct ways, such as the election of Donald Trump and the torch-bearing white men in Charlottesville chanting their fears of being replaced.

Lemert claims that “enlightened social maturity” may be “accepting the world for what it is, and learning to speak of it in its particular, differential details—without denying anything, without leaving onself out, no matter how painful it may be to be there,” because he insists that “even those who are not prominently touched or marked by a history of exclusion... understand them, often against their deepest wishes” (2004, p.
While Charlottesville may point to a more extreme example of the denial of this knowledge and understanding, many disciplines and professions (including sociology and librarianship) have struggled to “[face] the terrifying work of admitting that” even the good critical work they have done and continue to do are “largely from within the culture it” critiques (Lemert, 2004, p. 208). This reflexiveness is key to undoing the material and psychic damage that the presumption of the universality and objectivity of the white, European and European American, straight, nondisabled subject has had.

**Representation, recognition, and status**

In the same year that Lemert was describing “the crisis,” Fraser (1995) described the struggle for recognition of difference as an important and incomplete move toward justice, because these struggles “occur in a world of exacerbated material inequality” (p. 68). “Instead of simply endorsing or rejecting all of identity politics” (p. 69), she pushed for analyses of how “economic disadvantage and cultural disrespect are currently intertwined with and support one another,” ultimately demanding and initiating “a critical theory of recognition, one which identifies and defends only those versions of the cultural politics of difference that can be coherently combined with the social politics of equality” (p. 69). In other words, because injustice can be both material and cultural, recognition of difference and redistribution of resources must go hand in hand.

In children’s literature, recognition is authentic, nonstereotyped representation. It may also be a reading public that is prepared to read about those who are different from themselves. Redistribution comes through texts that are published and thoroughly vetted
by the community about whom the books are written. It is also readers having access to those texts and those texts receiving the same level of marketing, respect, and word of mouth support.

Fraser noticed that redistribution and recognition seemed at odds with each other, because redistribution claims “often call for abolishing economic arrangements that underpin group specificity” while recognition claims “often call attention to,” and sometimes create that very group specificity (1995, p. 74). These recognition claims require “changing the cultural valuations” of both the marginalized and privileged groups (pp. 77-78).

Fraser describes “affirmative” redistribution and recognition as those which are “aimed at correcting inequitable outcomes of social arrangements without disturbing the underlying framework that generates them” (p. 82). These forms provide “surface reallocations” of “existing goods” and “respect” “to existing groups,” support “group differentiation,” and has the possibility of “generat[ing] misrecognition” (p. 87) such as “mark[ing]” marginalized people as “deficient and insatiable” as their economic needs are recognized (p. 90) to be problematic. Instead, she advocates for “transformative” redistribution and recognition, which “deep[ly] restructur[e] relations” of “production” and “recognition,” “blur group differentiation,” and “can help remedy some forms of misrecognition” (p. 87).

According to Fraser, this transformative remedy creates “a culture in which hierarchical racial dichotomies are replaced by demassified and shifting networks of multiple intersecting differences” (p. 91). While this allows for more economic and cultural freedom in the long run, she acknowledges that this feels “removed from the
immediate interests of” marginalized groups, “as these are currently culturally constructed” (p. 91), but it also “promotes the task of coalition building,” and a move away from the assumption of “a zero-sum game” (p. 93).

In 2001, she further described and critiqued a model of recognition that “impose[s] a single, drastically simplified group identity” that also “reifies culture” (p. 24), proposing instead what she called a “status model” that requires the recognition of the “status of group members as full partners in social interaction,” “capable of participating on a par with other members” (p. 24). People’s needs and interests will not be completely the same, even when they have important commonalities.

Instead of asking for simple recognition, which might lead to a solidified stereotyped view of the group, people from marginalized groups need to have full rights of participation within the larger society. She calls this “participatory parity” (p. 25), and states that it requires both “distribution of material resources” that “ensure[s] participants’ independence and voice” and “institutionalized patterns of cultural value express equal respect for all participants and ensure equal opportunity for achieving social esteem” (p. 29). By “presupposing the equal moral worth of human beings” (p. 30), participatory parity does not require certain standards of normalcy for a person to be considered valuable. In analyzing children’s literature, one must particularly take heed of her warning against those “value patterns” that “deny some people the status of full partners in interaction – whether by burdening them with excessive ascribed ‘difference’ or by failing to acknowledge their distinctiveness” (p. 29).
Intersectionality

In her groundbreaking work on intersectionality, Crenshaw describes a metaphorical basement that contains “all people who are disadvantaged,” stacked on top of each other, living below the floor of those who are “not disadvantaged in any way.” “In efforts to correct some aspects of domination, those above the ceiling admit from the basement only those who can say that ‘but for’ the ceiling, they too would be in the upper room” (1989, pp. 151-152). Crenshaw named intersectionality in her work within Critical Race Theory (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1242) as a way to understand the particular experiences of women of color (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991), but the ideas can be traced back to Sojourner Truth and the Combahee River Collective 1977 Statement (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 67). Vivian May explains that “intersectionality exposes how conventional approaches to inequality… mistakenly rely on single-axis modes of analysis and redress; deny or obscure multiplicity or compoundedness, and depend upon the very systems of privilege they seek to challenge” (May, 2011, p. 156), an echo of the dilemma of the crisis.

Patricia Hill Collins states that definitions of intersectionality are still in flux, and that it is sometimes used as a “field of study,” “an analytical strategy” occurring primarily within academia, and “critical praxis” (2015, p. 3). Collins explains how “intersectional knowledge projects” embrace “one, some combination, or all” of a number of assumptions:

1) “Categories of analysis” such as race and gender “are best understood in relational terms rather than in isolation”
2) “These mutually constructing categories underlie and shape intersecting systems of power”

3) “Intersecting systems of power catalyze social formations of complex social inequalities” through “unequal material realities and distinctive social experiences”

4) Because of the historical and cultural specificity of “social inequalities,” these “unequal material realities and distinctive social experiences may vary across time and space”

5) “Social locations” influence individuals’ and groups’ “points of view on their own and others’ experiences with complex social inequalities” and their “knowledge projects” reflect those social locations

6) “Complex social inequalities fostered by intersecting systems of power are fundamentally unjust” (p. 14).

In using intersectionality as an analytical strategy to examine award-winning children’s literature, a reader can examine how the author handles multiple axes of identity, holding how these axes interlock. Reading with an awareness of the concerns of just a single axis of identity serves to uphold the privilege of those who are already most privileged, by presenting their experience as universal and leaving out the experiences of others. This justifies the oppression of others and oppressive structures in general, by buying into a system that inherently values some lives and experiences over others.

Contexts influence how oppressive structures in texts are read, recognized, and understood. Analyses of children’s literature need to take multiple axes into account to
ensure that what seems fair for one group is not, in fact, an unjust misrecognition for another.

**Critical Race Theory**

In understanding African American representation in children’s literature, Critical Race Theory is a useful lens, because, among other reasons, it “enables researchers, teachers, teacher-educators as well as youth to systematically understand some of racism’s enduring influence from the perspective of those exploited” (Brooks, 2009, p. 42), providing deep, experiential insight into some of the patterns which racism continues to follow. Not only that, Delgado and Stefancic in their introduction to Critical Race Theory, say that “Attacking embedded preconceptions that marginalize others or conceal their humanity is a legitimate function of all fiction” (2001, p. 42). “A multidisciplinary epistemology” (Brooks, 2009, p. 37) coming out of the law field (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001), Critical Race Theory has been utilized within diverse fields, including education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) and children’s literature (McNair, 2008; Hughes-Hassell et al, 2009). Because of its origin in law, the original tenets of Critical Race Theory are related to the U.S. legal system, but as seen in McNair’s analysis of the works of Patricia McKissack (2008) and Hughes-Hassell et al’s examination of race and books for transitional readers (2009), they can be used as a lens for evaluating children’s literature, as well.

While there is no exhaustive list of tenets of Critical Race Theory, I consider four in my analyses of both the criteria and manuals and of the award winners. These tenets
are the ones utilized by McNair in her analysis of the works of *The Brownies’ Book* and contemporary works by Patricia McKissack (2008), which importantly placed “critical race theory within the context of children’s literature” (p. 21). These tenets are 1) the embeddedness of racism in our lives to the point that it appears natural and normal (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Brooks, 2008; McNair, 2008), 2) counterstorytelling, a legal technique whose strategies can also be seen in literature by and about marginalized groups, (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; McNair, 2008; Brooks, 2008; Hughes-Haskell et al, 2009) which “[call] into question normative depictions of everyday living that ignore or discount structural barriers to equality faced by people of color” (Brooks, 2009, p. 38) and that “validate their life circumstances and serve as powerful ways to challenge and subvert the versions of reality held by the privileged” (Hughes-Haskell et al, 2009), 3) whiteness as property (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Brooks, 2008; McNair, 2008; Hughes-Haskell et al, 2009) as “races are categories that society invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 7) in a way that has historically benefited those considered white, and 4) Bell’s interest convergence theory in which policies and situations that benefit people of color only come into existence if they also benefit white people (Bell, 1992; McNair, 2008; Hughes-Haskell et al, 2009). The theory of intersectionality comes directly out of Critical Race Theory (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1242) and Lynn (2004) also describes the intersectional nature of Critical Race Theory (p. 156).

An understanding of the causes and effects of racism through Critical Race Theory can give readers a way to interrogate the ways in which books replicate the
causes, ameliorate the effects, or present new ways of understanding race and racialized groups.

**LatCrit**

LatCrit is particularly useful for understanding Latinx representation in children’s literature, because of its critical emphasis and because it focuses on “the unique history and challenges facing the Spanish speaking diaspora of immigrants in the United States” (Tozer et al, 2011, p. 223). It is “the first offshoot” of Critical Race Theory (Tozer et al, 2011,p. 223), and it aids in understanding how “Latina/os have been subjected to injustice and prejudice, thereby pushed into positions of marginality and disempowerment” (Valdes, 1997, p. 1096). This theory focuses specifically on Latinx experiences of marginalization, with an awareness of “the difference between legal and political citizenship, on the one hand, and cultural and social citizenship on the other” (Malavet, 2004, p. 342), the two sides of Fraser’s redistribution and recognition framework.

While cultural relevance (Naidoo, 2016), cultural consciousness (Sanchez & Landa, 2016), and authenticity (Martínez-Roldán, 2013; Riojas-Cortez & Cataldo, 2016) have all been included in analyses of Latinx in children’s literature, LatCrit is relatively new in the field of children’s literature. However, using Critical Race Theory and LatCrit, DeNicolo (2016) describes how the intentional and critical use of children’s literature by “Latino authors” (p. 137) through “literature discussion, textual connections, testimonio (personal narrative), and bilingual stories” is beneficial for bilingual learners (p. 124). In her recent study using Critical Race Theory and LatCrit, Osorio (2018)
learned that children’s border stories were an essential part of the classroom, and that through sharing their border stories as well as reading multicultural literature, her students were able to see that they were not alone in their experiences “and that their experiences and lives had value” (p. 102-103).

Solorzano and Delgado Bernal (2001) describe two key differences between Critical Race Theory and LatCrit. They describe LatCrit’s “progressive sense of a coalitional Latina/Latino pan-ethnicity” and its acknowledgement of “language, immigration, ethnicity, culture, identity, phenotype, and sexuality” which they claim Critical Race Theory ignores (p. 311), but their descriptions of the main tenets of LatCrit and Critical Race Theory are the same. In contrast, Valdes describes the “levels or functions” of LatCrit as 1) “the production of knowledge” and creation of a “culture of understanding about Latinas/os and the law,” 2) “the advancement of transformation,” improving the “lives of Latinas/os and other subordinated groups,” 3) “the expansion and connection of struggle(s),” “on behalf of diverse Latinas/os, but also toward a material transformation that fosters social justice for all,” and 4) “the cultivation of community and coalition” (Valdes, 1997, pp. 1093-1094). A combination of these four things denotes an ideal standard for children’s literature in its representation of Latinx characters and culture.

Disability Studies

Coming out of the Disability Rights Movement (Smith & Erevelles, 2004, pp. 32-33) Disability Studies was initially primarily used in the social sciences (Ferguson &
Nusbaum, 2012, p. 71). In 2004, *Disability Studies Quarterly* published an issue that focused on “Disability Culture in Children's Literature” but only two of the articles directly stated that they were using a Disability Studies lens, Kerry Kidd’s “The mother and the angel: Disability Studies, mothering and the 'unreal' in children's fiction” (2004) and Saunders’ “What Disability Studies can do for children’s literature” (2004). In 2016, Bérubé used a Disability Studies lens to analyze how disability influences narrative structures and Valint analyzed gender, class, and the social construction of disability in *The Secret Garden* through a Disability Studies lens.

Although (like the other theoretical lenses) not “some sort of purity test” (Ferguson & Nusbaum, 2012, p. 72), Disability Studies provides a valuable lens for examining the representation of disability in children’s literature. Five of its main, distinctive “core concepts” are 1) “the study of disability must be social” and “disability is more than an individual impairment” (Ferguson & Nusbaum, 2012, p. 72), 2) “disability—and the concept of disability—must be part of the very foundation of attempts to understand what is different as well as what is normal” (Ferguson & Nusbaum, 2012, p. 74) and as Kidd states, “in itself difference can be seen as a source for joy, for positive endeavour and the possession of a unique, different and wholly valid perspective, or life experience” (2004), 3) “the study of disability must be interdisciplinary” and “we must draw upon the tools and traditions of all our ways of knowing about the world” (Ferguson & Nusbaum, 2012, p. 74), 4) “the study of disability must be participatory,” in other words, inclusive of the work of people with disabilities (Ferguson & Nusbaum, 2012, p. 74) 5) “the study of disability must be values-based” (Ferguson & Nusbaum, 2012, p. 74) with “some consideration of ethical implications
within all approaches to knowledge about people with disabilities” (Ferguson & Nusbaum, 2012, p. 75). The call for a values-based study of disability lends itself to the resistant reading that Yenika-Agbaw (1997) suggests for critical multiculturalism.

Disability Studies considers the ways society creates and reacts to disability (Smith & Erevelles, 2004, pp. 32-34). This “social model” of disability works against a more traditional “medical model.” “Children's literature written from [the medical model] emphasizes qualities like physical ‘wholeness,’ good looks, and high intelligence” and other qualities “are demeaned, stigmatized, ridiculed, feared and degraded” (Adomat, 2014, Disability Studies Perspectives on Children's Literature). This further stigmatizes those who do not live up to ideals of white, European American, straight, nondisabled normalcy, including both those who do and do not have disabilities. Representations of disability in children’s literature should show disability as a regular part of life rather than something to be shunned, feared, or mocked. Fictional characters and real people with disabilities should have their equal moral worth considered and respected, rather than made special or deviant.

Queer Theory

While “queer” as in “eccentric and singular” (Abate & Kidd, 2011, p. 4) has long been an element in children’s literature, the first openly GLBT novel was *I’ll Get There: It Better Be Worth the Trip*, published in 1969, the same year as the Stonewall riots (Abate & Kidd, 2011, p. 1). Queer Theory is beneficial when examining representation
of GLBT characters in children’s literature, because it “challenges the construction of homosexuality as a minority position” (Miller, 2014, p. 137).

Although “there is not a uniform way to put the diversity of queer theory to use when reading” (Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2013, p. 145), some elements are often utilized in analyses. These are 1) its “critique of identity” and “interest in troubling the normative, binary structures that create identity categories in the first place” (Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2013, p. 146) while “attempt[ing] to make space for those who reject or cannot fit into these previously rigid categories” (Crisp, 2011, p. 197) so that issues of sexuality and identity are not just about what is considered normal, and 2) “the wide variety of possible ways of being, living, and loving” (Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2013, p. 146). In these and other ways, Queer Theory “highlights and encourages a proliferation of identity categories, and both denotes and celebrates outlaw, uncontrolled, unruly subjectivities” (p. 146), considering the ways texts do and do not allow for varied identities, beyond what is considered normal. Queer Theory sees queerness as more than just sexuality or a particular kind of sexuality, but instead as the breaking of binaries and boundaries. Identity itself becomes less static and solid and possibilities for relationships with others expand, in ways that are both linked to sexuality and not. When GLBT people “are not accepted, bodies are open to violence” (Miller, 2015, p. 31), and gender and sexuality norms “[police] and [inhibit] internal freedom” (p. 33). Using Queer Theory to analyze children’s literature opens up possibilities for acceptable ways of being, allowing for equal status for those who live and love in ways that are outside of what is considered normal.
Critical Multiculturalism

A way of using Critical Race Theory, LatCrit, Disability Studies, and Queer Theory in an intersectional way, while critically examining power structures, is critical multiculturalism, because while “each theoretical analysis of oppression usefully unpacks the workings and institutionalization of unequal power relations,” “focusing on one axis of oppression offers only a partial analysis” (May & Sleeter, 2010, p. 10). Willis et al. (2008) describe a critical consciousness as one that “challeng[es] the underlying assumptions that work in the internal and external worlds to privilege some while disprivileging others” (p. 5). This critical consciousness expands the understanding of critical multiculturalism beyond just understanding that there are differences between people, but that privilege is at work.

A critically conscious multicultural analysis would take the understanding of power and inequity of Critical Race Theory, work of social justice, community and coalition of LatCrit, awareness of the social creation of normalcy and difference within Disability Studies, and possibilities of being, living and loving that Queer Theory expands, and challenge assumptions within texts that work against that understanding, work, awareness, and possibility. The goal of all of these theories all fit with McLaren’s description of the goal of critical multiculturalism, which is “not to reverse the margins and centers of power but to displace their founding binarisms and dependent hierarchies” (Steinberg, et al. 2006). Yenika-Agbaw’s resistant reading of texts (1997) is vital, because, within the lens of critical multiculturalism, the representations of marginalized groups “are understood as the result of larger social struggles over signs and meanings”
(McLaren, 1995, p. 98). This critical lens views literary texts as “cultural products informed by a certain ideology” (Yenika-Agbaw, 2015, p. 98).

Each theory is necessarily unique to the group about whom it is crafted, and each theory can deepen our understanding of the situation of each group, towards an intersectional understanding of marginalization, its causes and effects. This intersectional understanding is different from a “multicultural paradigm” that “attempts to be everything for everyone and consequently becomes nothing for everyone” (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995, p. 62), because it centers the systems of marginalization to understand the diversion of power to a few, while honoring the ways that the experiences of being African American, Latinx, labeled with a disability, or GLBT are all unique (both within and between groups).

Intersectionality is about “inequality, relationality, power, social context, complexity, and social justice” (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 25), all of which are ideas embedded in the previous identity-specific theories, and each of the critical theories of identity listed above has the potential to be intersectional and have each been used in intersectional ways. For example, Schweik (2009) wrote about how disability and class influenced the law, but also the implications of race, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality for our understanding of disability. She describes this work as not just about intersections but also about confluences, which she describes as “different currents but not entirely different matter or substance” (p. 61). She quotes duCille’s caution of the danger of being run over within an intersection, but adds that everyone “is subject to the principle of intersectional identity, whether run over by it or in the driver’s seat” (p. 143), because power has much to do with where one stands and moves in that intersection. In the
afterword of the LatCrit VII symposium, Malavet describes LatCrit symposia as giving insight into “how ‘othering’ has multiple sources” and “the power of deconstructing entrenched power normativities from an outsider perspective, hence, the power of not belonging” (2004, p. 321).

Like the awards, each of these theories necessarily insists on the central importance of the concerns of the group for whom the theory was formulated, although some of the theories explicitly consider other marginalized groups. It is important to remember that even though each identity category is constructed, they also have real effects. Each of the theories describes both the constructedness and the real effects, as well as the unique experience of the group the theory focuses on. While I am focusing only on the theories that are directly related to the experiences of the people the awards are about, I am aware that those four theories do not describe fully all of the ways people are marginalized.

Each of the identity focused theories have spaces of overlap and spaces of disconnection. Critical Race Theory often seems to be solely about race, although its history and intentions are more inclusive than that. Its emphasis on how racism is embedded in society and its inclusion of interest convergence are unique, but counterstorytelling aligns with LatCrit’s push for a deeper understanding of Latinx people and the participatory nature of Disability Studies, and the idea of whiteness as property is connected to Disability Studies’ understanding of disability as social and Queer Theory’s critique of identity. Beyond its connections to Critical Race Theory, LatCrit’s focus on the production of knowledge about Latinx and its emphasis on transforming the lives of Latinx and others for the better echoes Disability Studies’
insistence that people with disabilities participate in how disability is understood. Its cultivation of coalition is echoed in Disability Studies’ need for interdisciplinary work, and its expansion of struggle allows for the multitude of ways of living and loving that Queer Theory allows for and promotes. Disability Studies and Queer Theory are linked in how they are deeply focused on how categories of difference and normalcy are constructed. Each critical social theory of identity describes how power is managed to benefit those (white people, nonimmigrants, nondisabled people, straight people) who are considered normal, as well as methods to disrupt this power consolidation. For this project, I adopt a Critical Multicultural framework that intersectionally utilizes identity-specific insights into power.

Like the theories are connected, other experiences across groups may be similar. African American identity and Latinx identity is generally seen as a similarity with one’s family, but disability and queerness can be a radical departure from one’s family and can result in loss of family. There is also a connection between Latinx culture and queer culture in that there is a sense that you’ve departed from your family on purpose, either through immigration or through a choice to accept one’s queer desire. Disability and GLBT identity often (although not always) represents a radical departure from the experiences of the rest of one’s immediate family.

Critical Race Theory, LatCrit, Disability Studies, and Queer Theory are critical social theories that describe and analyze the experiences of specific forms of difference, in ways that delineate the challenges, strengths, and unique experiences that are specific to each group, particularly as they relate to power and privilege. Intersectional critical multiculturalism brings together the particular experiences of power for each group in
order to break down the hierarchies and binaries that are ignored when focused on a single axis of oppression. As celebrated representations of these groups, books that win the Coretta Scott King, Pura Belpré, Schneider, and Stonewall awards should give readers mirrors and windows to the challenges, strengths, and unique experiences that are specific to each group. The Newbery award, not having specific ties to any marginalized group, might miss the concerns of marginalized groups in its prizing process, but winners of the identity-specific awards have the opportunity to be models of representation of other groups, due to their focus on experiences of marginalization.

The Problem

Teachers are not always prepared to address the diversity in their classroom and the broader community, so awards become a tool in finding books for the classroom (Botelho & Rudman, 2009; Yokota, in Wolf, et al., 2011, pp. 467-478). While there have been critiques of the institution of children’s literature awards (Kidd, 2007) and of the identity-themed awards as institutions that perpetuate identity politics (Aronson, 2001), as well as studies of individual children’s book awards and their winners (Brooks, 2009; Cummins, 2014; Goldsmith, 1931; Gomm et al, 2017; Jimenez, 2015; Nelson & Nelson, 2016; Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2013; Taxel, 1986; Yenika-Agbaw, 2009), there is a gap in the literature about how the awards work together to represent the concept of difference, how the awards criteria influence the representations that are valued, and how they make room for other groups who are considered different. While each award has
much to study and discover, an examination of identity-focused awards and how they represent intersections and axes of power is necessary.

With its near unrelenting focus on books with white, European American, nondisabled, heterosexual characters, the Newbery has ignored those outside that mold, effectively placing them as different from what is both typical and what is valued. The Coretta Scott King, Pura Belpré, Schneider, and Stonewall awards were each created as a response to misrecognition and underrepresentation in both publishing and prizing. The criteria for the awards frame the ways in which the awards respond to the way each group is considered different, and books that win the awards tell a story about what it is to be considered different. However, in their response to the selective tradition of publishing and prizing, they are not explicitly intersectional, which has effects on how other groups are recognized and represented.

In considering how the awards push back against the selective tradition or create a new one through who and what they represent or recognize, I seek to address three questions:

1) What are the criteria for the selection of the winning books of the Coretta Scott King, Pura Belpré, Schneider, and Stonewall awards? How do these criteria address difference as a concept? How do they differ from those of the Newbery award?

2) How do recent winners (between 2012 and 2016) of the Coretta Scott King, Pura Belpré, Schneider, Stonewall, and Newbery represent the experience of difference?
3) How do the winners of each award allow for the equal status and participatory parity of other marginalized groups?

**Definition of Terms**

Hall (1997b) explained that meanings are slippery and changeable, and that culture helps determine which meanings people will find in things and to provide shared meanings. “Attempting to ‘fix’” those meanings “is the work of a representational practice” (Hall, 1997a, p. 228), as the practice of representation tries to tell a particular story and have a particular meaning. Relevant to my concern with children’s books that are meant to represent “the experience” of African Americans, Latinx, people with disabilities, and GLBT people is Hall’s idea that “people who are in any way significantly different from the majority—‘them’ rather than ‘us’—are frequently exposed to [a] binary form of representation,” in which they are “often required to be both things at the same time” (Hall, 1997a, p. 231).

As representations accumulate, meanings also accumulate inter-textually, with representations referring to each other or just having their meanings “altered by being ‘read’ in the context of other images” (Hall, 1997a, p. 232). The “whole repertoire of imagery and visual effects through which ‘difference’ is represented at any one historical moment” can be called a “regime of representation” (p. 232). This representation can come in the form of stereotyping, which has “essentializing, reductionist, and naturalizing effects” (p. 257). Stereotypes can be a way of exercising power (p. 259), and can even lead to an ambivalence in which the “victims” of a stereotype can “unconsciously
[confirm the stereotype] by the very terms in which they try to oppose and resist it” (p. 263), but they can also, potentially more powerfully, take “an existing meaning and re-appropriat[e] it for new meanings” (p. 270). The regime of representation is a misrepresentation of the lived realities of both those who are considered normal and those who are considered different.

“Difference”

“Difference” is a loaded term and I do not use it lightly. As Peter McLaren says, “differences are always differences in relation” (1995, p. 105). He cautions that “both identity based on ‘sameness’ and identity based on ‘difference’ are forms of essentialist logic,” and my definition of difference contains within it his idea that “difference is always a product of history, culture, power, and ideology [that] must be understood in terms of the specificity of their production” (p. 99). He cites Mohanty’s definition of difference “as asymmetrical and incommensurate cultural spheres situated within hierarchies of domination and resistance” (1989, p. 181).

Baca Zinn and Thornton Dill (1996) advocate for multiracial feminism and its focus “on the way in which differences and domination intersect and are historically and socially constituted” (p. 74), because often this difference is related to race, ethnicity, ability, gender, sexuality, or class. It can also be more subtle. The differences between children and adults, as well as the use of didactic “recognition and tolerance” of differences such as “gender, race, disability and sexuality,” have been common themes in “Anglo-American children’s literature” (Vallone, 2009, p. 174).
In this dissertation, I define difference as both qualities and characteristics that mark a person, usually as lesser than, within the “asymmetrical and incommensurate cultural spheres,” and as the state of being understood to be different from than those who are commonly considered to be normal. Difference is often considered to be deviant, troublesome, dirty, dangerous, dark, or treacherous. But it can also be a site of strength, joy and pleasure. Every person is different, and for those who are otherwise considered normal, unique characteristics are held in high regard.

However, for those who are different in ways that Lemert considers “produced” and “hard,” their differences activate “territorial claims” that are thought of as “potentially dangerous” (Lemert, 2004, p. 228). These differences are outside of what is acceptable, and they are no longer fascinating characteristics. These differences mark them as less worthy of cultural respect or material equality. Being considered racially different from the norm of whiteness has been used as an excuse for physical violence, housing and educational segregation, slavery, and economic inequality, all of which have been justified through mythical fears of physical safety, economic anxiety, and considerations of inferiority. Being considered ethnically or linguistically different from the norm of European American English speakers has been used as an excuse for physical violence, deportation, forced acculturation, and misuse of labor, justified through fears of irrationality, magical powers, laziness, or inferior intelligence. Being considered different in ability from those around whom dominant American culture(s) have been built has been used as an excuse for physical violence, educational segregation, and the withholding of communication and mobility tools, because of fears of a society becoming overly burdened. Being considered different in sexuality or gender from those who are
heterosexual and male or female has been used as an excuse for physical violence, denial of relationships and identity, and estrangement from family and community, because of a fear of sin, disease, or overly licentious behavior. All of these differences are also considered dangerous because of a fear that those who are considered normal may actually have those qualities.

“Normalcy”

I contrast the idea of “difference” with the idea of “normalcy,” another constructed term. Hall describes the “splitting” that stereotyping does, dividing “the normal and the acceptable from the abnormal and the unacceptable,” setting up a “symbolic frontier between the ‘normal’ and the ‘deviant,’ the ‘normal’ and the ‘pathological,’... what ‘belongs’ and what does not or is ‘Other’ (1997, p. 258).

Normalcy, as a term and concept, occurs within both disability studies and queer theory. Disability is often positioned as “disadvantaged…, unproductive…, limited…, or unnatural” because people with disabilities are understood to “lack… normal capacities” (Koch, 2005, p. 124), thus disability is “part of the very foundation of attempts to understand what is... normal” (Ferguson & Nusbaum, 2012, p. 73). Similarly, queer theory “unearths… how notions of normal are constructed and enforced” (Bower & Klecka, 2009, pp. 231-232), as even though the term “queer” means lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or any number of other “deviant” sexualities, it also means “eccentric and singular” (Abate & Kidd, 2011, p. 4).
While normal as an idea is an explicit part of these two theories, it is relevant to Critical Race Theory and LatCrit as well, because European American whiteness is commonly agreed upon as what is normal. White people may view multiculturalism as an imposition “because they believe that they stand apart from culture and lead 'normal' lives” (Shannon, 1994, p. 1), and racialized “understandings of what constitutes ‘the ordinary’ within the public imagination” shape “public policy and social practice” (Lamont Hill, 2013, p. 109-110) influencing legal, educational, formal, and informal treatment of African Americans and Latinx people. While the characters in Coretta Scott King, Pura Belpré, Schneider, and Stonewall awards all acutely experience being considered different, they are not responsible for the difference. There is nothing inherently wrong with normalcy, because there are many experiences and ways of being that are common between many people, and that commonality should not be pathologized any more than difference currently is. Only through overvaluing normalcy does difference become important. Heath (in Wolf et al, 2011) says that “the issue of difference is not that it is there, but how much difference we allow it to make for us” (p. 44). All people are unique and different from each other, but the differences that the awards focus on have cultural and material effects. Being white or European American or nondisabled or straight affords people with opportunities that are like rewards for adequate normalcy.
In this dissertation, unless quoting or referring to a specific writer’s words, I will use the terms “African American,” “Latinx,” “people with disabilities,” and “gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender” or “GLBT” to refer to the identities that the awards are meant to recognize. “African American” is the term used by the Coretta Scott King Awards for people of African descent living in the United States. The Pura Belpré Award uses the term “Latino” for “people whose heritage emanates from any of the Spanish-speaking cultures of the Western Hemisphere” (Association for Library Service to Children, 2016b), but I will use “Latinx” for greater gender inclusivity. The Stonewall Award uses “gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender” for people who experience same sex attraction, attraction to more than one sex, or whose gender identity is different from the sex they were assigned at birth, and although the terms for that group is constantly changing and expanding to be more inclusive, I will use the terms that the award uses for consistency. The Schneider Award does not have one uniform term to refer to people are “living with a disability, whether the disability is physical, mental, or emotional” (Katherine Schneider, cited in Schneider Family Book Award, 2014, Terms and Definitions), but it uses terms such as “person with the disability” (Schneider Family Book Award, 2014, Terms and Definitions), “characters with disabilities” (Criteria), and “person with disability” (Criteria) most often, so I will copy that person-first language.
Project Overview

As I began this project, I looked to the identity-based award-winning books for representations of the experience of difference that would serve as mirrors for some groups and windows for others. These groups are underrepresented in children’s literature, with people with disabilities and GLBT people as even somewhat taboo. The awards proclaim that their winners are the finest examples of the literature by and about their group. Of the books that have been written and published, those that receive awards that have been created to fill a gap in representation should open up opportunities for equality, both for the group represented by the award, and for others. Otherwise, the selective tradition that they are part of perpetuates and continues existent hierarchies.

In Chapter Two, I will present a review of studies of the selective tradition in children’s literature, children’s literature awards, and critical analyses of award-winning children’s literature. I chose these articles because they historically and contextually ground my study in the important, previous work on representation in award-winning children’s literature. Using the theoretical framework which I’ve presented, I analyse the previous work that has been done.

Chapter Three will present my findings for the investigation of the first set of research questions that guide the study, What are the criteria for the selection of the winning books of the Coretta Scott King, Pura Belpré, Schneider, and Stonewall awards? How do they address difference as a concept? How do they differ from those of the Newbery award? In order to do that, I examine the history of the awards and then work to understand the criteria as they currently stand as represented on websites and in
manuals. The published criteria for the awards are useful because they present an official, somewhat static, document of what the awards are for. The criteria say more about the understanding of difference as a concept that the awards represent, than any individual’s intentions for the awards, no matter how linked to the awards that individual is.

As I analyzed the criteria, I emailed chairs, liaisons, and other members of committees to make sure I was looking at the criteria that was being used for each of the years. I noticed that the Coretta Scott King Award manual had been updated in 2015 and then again in 2016, so I wanted to make sure that I knew if there were any changes in the criteria for the years I was looking at. I didn’t want to claim that the winners from 2012 had been chosen based on criteria that had not, in fact, been introduced until after that award year. Based on my research on the ALA website and my correspondence and conversations with committee members (N. Ward, personal communication, September 10, 2016; J. McNair, personal communication, September 10, 2016; C. Malden, personal communication, September 19, 2016; P. Bracy, personal communication, October 12, 2016), it seems that while there have been some minor changes as to how the award committees organize themselves or operate, the only change in what is named as important for the selection of an award-winning book is an additional half page section about the value of diversity within the Association for Library Service to Children which was added to the Newbery Medal’s (Association for Library Service to Children, 2012; 2015) and the Pura Belpré Medal’s (Association for Library Service to Children and REFORMA: The National Association to Promote Library Services to Latinos and the Spanish-Speaking, 2013; 2015) manuals in 2015, and is titled “Diversity and ALSC
Media Award Evaluation.” Because of the otherwise nearly identical language in the editions of each manual, I will be citing and referring to the most recent editions.

The Schneider, Pura Belpré, and Newbery Award manuals explicitly suggest material to read outside of the manuals themselves (and the books being considered for the awards, of course). The Schneider Award manual suggests reading about Katherine Schneider (the donor who endowed the award) herself through reading her book and some articles about her, and it suggests a link to suggestions for “Evaluating Materials about Children with Disabilities” (Schneider Family Book Award, 2014). The link itself is a dead link, but by Googling the title, I found a list within the same domain, presumably the recommended list (Linda Lucas Walling Collection for Universal Access, 2016). The language of the evaluation list is not contained within the award manual itself. It is useful to consider, because it gives guidelines for how to judge representations of disability within literature, and no other guidelines for judging representations of disability are listed in the manual.

On the other hand, the Newbery Award manual lists six books about the field of children’s literature and its evaluation and nine other documents about the Newbery award itself as potential recommended reading (Association for Library Service to Children, 2015, pp. 23-24). The Pura Belpre award manual lists five books and 14 other documents about authenticity, Latinx children’s literature and its evaluation, evaluating children’s literature more generally, and the Pura Belpré award (Association for Library Service to Children and REFORMA: The National Association to Promote Library Services to Latinos and the Spanish-Speaking, 2015, pp. 22-24). Those documents are useful reading for understanding what is considered quality children’s literature and how
the committees might consider what that is, but the status of these books and documents as strict criteria for the award is less clear or obvious. While the Schneider manual recommends one list of how to evaluate representations of disability within children’s literature, the Newbery and Pura Belpré manuals recommend that the committee members choose articles and chapters from a list, resulting in less cohesive criteria coming out of that recommendation. I considered using some of these documents to assist my understanding of the policies and procedures of the awards, but I decided that the documents, as rich as they may be, would not give a great deal more insight into the awards themselves.

Using qualitative content analysis (Krippendorff, 1989, 2013; Julien, 2008), I used paragraphs or lists from the manuals as the units of analysis, coding their themes based on a priori codes of “difference as a challenge,” “difference as strength,” “normalcy,” “within group difference,” and “others’ difference” based on my two other research questions and my concurrent analysis of the award-winning books. I broke these themes into smaller subthemes that were specific to the award criteria. I analyzed these themes and subthemes through the tenets of Critical Race Theory, LatCrit, Disability Studies, Queer Theory, and Critical Multicultural Analysis.

Chapter Four provides my findings for the second research question: How do recent winners (between 2012 and 2016) of the Coretta Scott King, Pura Belpré, Schneider, Stonewall, and Newbery represent the experience of difference? For this project, I analyze one winner of each of the Newbery, Coretta Scott King, Pura Belpré, Schneider, and Stonewall awards per year for the years between 2012 to 2016, resulting in five books for each award, for a total of 24, because Aristotle and Dante Discover the
Secrets of the Universe won both the Pura Belpré and Stonewall awards. I chose to look over five years in order to find a manageable but somewhat comprehensive sample of recent winners. I focus on the winners of either the author award or the middle grade award for each, depending on how the awards are named and distributed. In the period of time that I will be analyzing, two author winners of the Coretta Scott King award were for nonfiction books with illustrations, and those will be included, with my focus on the words as much as possible. The Stonewall children’s award was only given to novels until 2015, when This Day in June, a picture book, was the only children’s winner, so that will be the book I analyze for that year. In 2016, the award was split into two categories, a children’s and a young adult book, and I will focus on the young adult book. The Schneider award is given to three categories of books, children’s, middle grade, and teens, and I will focus on the middle grade winners. In 2016, two books were awarded the middle grade award, and I will be focusing on one of them, Fish in a Tree. In total, I will be analyzing 24 novels, because in 2013, the same novel, Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe, won the author award for the Pura Belpré award as well as the Stonewall award.

One reason to focus primarily on these winners is to compare similar types of texts with the historical Newbery, which is the oldest, most well-known and prestigious award for children’s literature. The Newbery winner is specifically for “American literature for children” (Association for Library Service to Children, 2015, p. 67) and their definition of children includes “persons of ages up to and including fourteen” (Association for Library Service to Children, 2016a), however most of the winners have been complex chapter books rather than picture books, which fits with middle grade
winners. Rather than considering the Caldecott, I chose to look at the Newbery Medal, because it is both the oldest children’s book award and has had more visible diversity in its winners, recently. The place of the Newbery as the standard-bearer for general excellence in children’s literature has solidified its place within the canon and selective tradition of children’s literature. Contrasting the winners of the awards that focus on identity to this award with purportedly universal appeal, gives insight into the ways experiences of being considered different are unique to the identity-focused awards.

Another reason I chose the author or middle grade winners is that the picture book winners for some of the awards have gone to the illustrators of the books, who are often different people than the authors of the book. While writing and illustrating books are often collaborative projects, understanding the interplay between one author’s words and another illustrator’s images seem like an overly ambitious piece to add to this project. Adding complexity to my project however, while the winners of the Newbery Medal have traditionally been novels for children, in 2016, a picture book, *Last Stop on Market Street* by Matt de la Peña won the award. The Newbery Medal Committee Chair, Ernie J. Cox, suggest that the book must be read aloud, because “the use of language to elicit questions, to spark imagination and to make us laugh is at its best when spoken,” taking the emphasis off the pictures (which were also honored for the Caldecott) (American Library Association, 2016d).

These award-winning books all received many glowing reviews before they received their awards, with the criticisms they received presented as minor glitches in otherwise important, well-crafted stories. These reviews likely increased the readership of these books, and made them more visible to award committee members. Almost every
review responded to the struggle of difference (Cart, 2011; Kirkus Reviews, August 15, 2011b; Kirkus Reviews, September 28, 2011; Publishers Weekly, September 1, 2011; Rochman, 2011; Sutton, 2011; Verbeten, 2011; Coats, 2012; Kirkus Reviews, August 22, 2012; Publishers Weekly, September 24, 2012; Coats, 2013; Phelan, 2013; Stevenson, 2013; Zipp, 2013; Andracki, 2014; Publishers Weekly, January 13, 2014; Chambers, 2015; Chaudhri, 2015; Engel, 2015; Park, 2015; Publishers Weekly, March 23, 2015; Publishers Weekly, April 6, 2015; Stevenson, 2015a; Stevenson, 2015b), with Publishers Weekly praising *Heart and Soul*’s representation of “the quiet power that survival requires” (September 1, 2011), Edinger calling *Enchanted Air*, “an intimate view of a complicated time and life” (2015), and Stevenson praising the moral of *Yaqui Delgado Wants to Kick Your Ass* as “tough and unfair stuff is really tough and unfair, but it’s also survivable” (2013). A few of those wrote about the strength that was gleaned from that struggle, with two of the reviews that found strength coming out of struggle focusing on *Hand in Hand* (Hunter-Gault, 2012; Hunt, 2013), with Hunter-Gault (2013) praising the ability of the men to “beat the odds and [use] their talents to help others,” three focusing on *Fish in a Tree* (Publishers Weekly, March, 2014; Publishers Weekly, December, 2014; Coats, 2015), and one about *The Porcupine of Truth* (Kirkus Reviews, February 16, 2015).

The fact that the characters are different in some way was important to most of the reviewers as well (Kirkus Reviews, May 3, 2011; Kirkus Reviews, August 15, 2011b; Publishers Weekly, July 15, 2011; Publishers Weekly, November 14, 2012; Ashton, 2012; Kirkus Review, August 22, 2012; Rosenfeld, 2012; Schneider, 2012; Coats, 2013; Publishers Weekly, June 24, 2013; Andracki, 2014; Goldsmith, 2014; Kirkus Reviews,
March 31, 2014; Cart, 2015; Kirkus Reviews, October 22, 2014; Publishers Weekly, October 22, 2014; Barthelmess, 2015; Park, 2015; Ratzan, 2015), as Ratzan (2015) praised *Enchanted Air* as an important book that shows “world history through diverse voices,” Rosenfeld (2012) praised *A Dog Called Homeless* for its representation of “spirited, sensitive” Sam, an embodiment of “the meaning of friendship and family but also reinforces the value of connection, communication, and compassion,” and Kirkus Reviews said “bravo” to *Girls Like Us* for its “respectful and winningly told story about people too often relegated to the role of plot device” (March 31, 2014). Three reviews present an idealized view of the men in *Hand in Hand* (Kirkus Review, August 29, 2012; Booklist, 2013; Bush, 2013), while Ackerman idealized Ally in *Fish in a Tree* (2015), Grant heaped praise upon Ivan in *The One and Only Ivan*, and Publishers Weekly says that “readers sense” that Nana in *Last Stop on Market Street* “brings people together wherever she goes” (October 27, 2014).

On the other hand, a few reviewers responded positively to the representations of characters as normal (Myers, 2011; Publishers Weekly, November 14, 2011; Kirkus Reviews, August 22, 2012; Cart, 2014; Coats, 2014; Schneider, 2014). This normalization becomes somewhat problematic in reviews that try to make the characters’ unique experiences and stories as overly universal (Quattlebaum, 2011; Hunt, 2012, Booklist, 2013; Chambers 2014; Moore, 2014; Publishers Weekly, March 31, 2014; Eady, 2014; Bush, 2015; Cooper, 2015) as Chambers (2014) complains about the title of *Brown Girl Dreaming*, thinking it “seems to confine the book in too narrow a box” and asks, “Will girls who aren’t brown know, without prompting, that they too are invited to this party?”
As I worked across the award-winning literature, I continued my engagement in qualitative content analysis (Krippendorff, 1989, 2013; Julien, 2008), keenly aware “that text is open to subjective interpretation, reflects multiple meanings, and is context dependent” (Julien, 2008, p. 120). Content analysis is useful for “identifying both conscious and unconscious messages communicated by text,” and involves “revisiting categories identified previously and combining or dividing them, resolving contradictions” (Julien, 2008, p. 120).

Because the identity-focused awards were created as direct responses to the ways in which each group had been left out of Newbery prizing, I considered references to each specific identity, as well as responses to those identities by other characters, as representations of difference. Whether I, the characters, the authors, or the committees consider those identities to be different, the groups have traditionally been marginalized and ignored in prizing, a reflection of their being considered different by the Newbery awards committees. I also included direct statements with the words “different” or “unique” in my examination. I read each of the books once, and then created codes of “difference as a challenge,” “difference as strength,” “within group difference,” and “normalcy,” based on the initial reading, as well as a code for “others’ difference” based on my third research question. For readability and clarity, due to editorial suggestions from readers, “within group difference” joined with “difference as strength” to create a richer category of “celebrating the strength and uniqueness of those considered different.”

To aid in my understanding of the books and their different meanings, I not only read the books, but also read reviews of the books, following McNair’s practice of “triangulat[ing] the data sources in order to support my interpretations,” (2008, p. 16).
Reviews I read came from *The New York Times, Kirkus Reviews, Horn Book, Publishers Weekly, BookPage, USA Today, Washington Post, Bulletin of the Center for Children’s Books,* and *Booklist.* For consistency, I chose to focus on reviews in major publications that have a large readership, that have editors, and that published reviews of more than one award-winning book within the period I’m looking at. This was a way to make the project manageable, but also to provide consistency. I chose to use publications with editors so that it wasn’t up to me to decide if a review site was publishing reasonable reviews, instead allowing the site’s editorial staff to make that decision for me. I did not read audiobook reviews, because the audiobook editions include the additional element of a voice actor, and were not the editions that won the award. I chose to focus on reviews, rather than informational articles or reports about the books after they had gained popularity or won awards. I also did not use reviews that were part of curated lists of books on certain themes or with certain qualities or educational merits. As I read the reviews, I paid particular attention to reviewers’ reflections on the ideas of identity and difference within the books, and was interested in the rare moments when reviewers talked about their own identities.

In my work to understand how the experience of being considered different is understood in Coretta Scott King, Pura Belpré, Schneider, and Stonewall criteria, manuals, and award winning books, I analyzed the books with the critical lenses of Critical Race Theory, LatCrit, Disability Studies, Queer Theory, and Critical Multiculturalism. In doing this, I look to Yenika-Agbaw’s reading of *Christmas in the Big House, Christmas in the Quarters* (1997) with pleasurable, post-colonial, and critical multicultural lenses, and her reading of Hans Christian Andersen stories through critical
disability theory (2011). I am also influenced by McNair’s reading of Patricia McKissack’s picture books and *The Brownies’ Book* through Critical Race Theory, in which she found that the texts “challenged dominant perspectives through storytelling” (2008, p. 17), engaged in “social protest against racism” (p. 18), and valued literacy (p. 18), even as they diverged in important ways. Most of all, I modeled my reading and analytical practices on Botelho & Rudman’s studies of literacy narratives, race, class, genre, gender, and hair in multicultural children’s literature through critical multicultural analysis (2009). In my analysis, I treat the awards separately, analyzing the themes within the five books together, and then I look for patterns across the awards.

In chapter Five, I answer the third research question of this study: *How do the winners of each award allow for the equal status and participatory parity of other marginalized groups?* I focus solely on the final coding category, “other’s difference,” which elicited subthemes about categories of difference that are addressed in the novels, beyond the focus of the awards themselves. Through Critical Race Theory, LatCrit, Disability Studies, and Queer Theory in my Critical Multicultural frame, I analyze the use of race, language, disability, sexuality, gender, and other categories to differentiate the focal identities from others. I continued to analyze how the identities that the awards focus on are presented in other books, as a way to consider what high-quality representation can be. However, as I consider how these groups are represented or not, it was important to consider the other groups that appear in the books as well.

In Chapter Six, I present a summary of these findings, and what that means for the American Library Association’s work toward challenging its own selective tradition. I consider how the decisions for these award winners are made and who is responsible
institutionally. I consider how the separate awards may allow for freedom of identity as well. I also address the problems and opportunities that become apparent, and the potential next steps and the impact for practice.

Cautions and Potential Limitations

Difference and normalcy are contextual and my understandings of the two ideas are based on my own experience. I exercise caution in naming a characteristic or idea as different or normal and in ascribing binary characteristics of difference and normalcy to complex characters and stories. It is difficult to tease out the differences between intentions and stated intentions, as well as if the intentions of the authors of the books or the committees bestowing the awards even matter.

Race, ability, sexuality, and ethnicity are in all the award-winners, in both intentional and unintentional ways, and a potential limitation of the study is that in examining awards that are based on identity categories, and putting all of the awards together as awards about “difference,” I run the risk of continuing to reify either the essentialism of those categories or of the idea of difference.

I probably find more of the cultural subtleties of the winners of the Stonewall awards than any of the other awards, missing metaphors and puzzling over meanings that might be obvious to cultural insiders. This is how it is for all readers, as we all bring our own understandings and meanings to texts. Content analysis is by its very nature context-dependent and inferential. Despite the potential limitations, I believe there is a need for such a study, because the even as the awards hold promising liberatory potential,
they are necessarily cultural products. This study follows important work on the selective
tradition in children’s literature, the practice of children’s literature awards, and the
dynamics of power for books that have won awards.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

In order to ground this study, an understanding of the work on the selective tradition in children’s literature, and of children’s literature awards is important. Taxel’s 1981 study, “The Outsiders of the American Revolution: The Selective Tradition in Children’s Fiction” was the first to bring the idea of the racialized selective tradition to children’s literature, but others followed with important work and insights into the function of this selective tradition in what is presented to children. All of these studies shed light on what the representation, or lack of representation, of difference has meant. I follow this review of literature on the selective tradition with an examination of Kidd’s study of the history and meaning of the Newbery award, in order to gain clearer insight into the aims and effects of the practice of children’s book awards. Finally, I examine reviews and critical studies of representation within award-winning books, which lay the groundwork for my study.

The Selective Tradition in Children’s Literature
The Outsiders of the American Revolution: The Selective Tradition in Children’s Fiction

The idea of a “selective tradition” (Williams, 1977) was brought into the field of children’s literature by Taxel’s work on books about the Revolutionary War (1981), in which he claimed that the treatment of people with less power may “be an active agent in the reproduction of ideologies and forms of consciousness that provide important support to, and justification of, racism, sexism, and the inequitable distribution of social and economic power and resources” (p. 222). Within a frame of “sociology of school knowledge” (p. 206), Taxel studied 32 children’s novels about the American Revolution, published between 1889 and 1976, providing “empirical evidence on how race and class” is presented within them, while contemplating the irony “that most of the authors in the sample apply the impassioned, ideologically-charged language used to justify the Revolution” for “human liberty and freedom” “to only selected segments of the colonial population” (p. 207).

In his presentation of the sociology of school knowledge, Taxel’s interpretation of the selective tradition within curricular materials fits with Critical Race Theory’s understanding that racism is so embedded in our lives that it seems natural and normal (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Brooks, 2008; McNair, 2008), when he describes how “the well documented minimization, distortion, and outright exclusion of women, blacks, and other racial and ethnic minorities in curricular materials is both a reflection and a cause of the relative powerlessness of these groups in the larger society” (p. 208), and this study, like Critical Multiculturalism, challenges “underlying assumptions” that influence privilege (Willis et al, 2008). Chronologically studying the
treatment of black characters in the books about the American Revolution, Taxel finds primarily overtly racist characterizations in the early books (1981, p. 212), a satisfaction with slavery as the way things are, by both white (p. 212) and black characters (p. 214) throughout most of the books, and in the later books, a lack of black people at all (p. 216).

In seeing how the books ignore the response of black people to their experience with slavery, Taxel is particularly concerned by fuel for “the paternalistic white belief that blacks are incapable of thinking and fending for themselves and constitutes an important component of the care-free, indolent stereotype” (p. 216). He is also critical of prevalence of middle and upper-class “champions of liberty” within the novels, in contrast to representations of lower-class characters as “uncouth, overly zealous, and prone to violence” (p. 217), giving an “impression of universality” despite the “markedly different” experiences of other groups (p. 220). Like a critical multicultural analysis, this work questions the seemingly inherent power and voice that white middle and upper-class characters are given, instead advocating for “efforts to write, incorporate, and transmit the history of all people” (p. 222).

The Brownies’ Book: Challenge to the Selective Tradition in Children’s Literature

Violet Harris (1986) considered the selective tradition in her dissertation on the The Brownies’ Book, “the first periodical published by Blacks for Black children” (p. 2) in what Rudine Sims Bishop considers “one of the first in-depth research studies to critically examine African American children’s literature as an African American
creation” (Bishop, in Wolf et al., 2011, p. 227). After describing the predominantly White, middle class focused periodicals that came before it, Harris named the origin of *The Brownies’ Book* as developing as a response to the hatred and trauma Black children were experiencing and the reports of racial incidents they learned about (1986, pp. 4-5). W.E.B. DuBois’s seven steps for the magazine, in Harris’s words, “proposed a model of social action or behavior that emphasized achievement, excellence, honor, duty, pride, industriousness, optimism, and tolerance,” a similar system of upper-middle class values that the popular *St. Nicholas* magazine did, but also “fostered racial pride, advocated racial uplift, and encouraged beliefs in academic excellence,” beginning “an alternative tradition in children’s periodicals” (pp. 5-6).

Referring back to Williams and Taxel, Harris claims that “*The Brownies' Book* challenged a selective tradition in children's literature that reflected the values and power of an upper class,” which included “commitment to industrial capitalism, conservative political principles, nationalism, morality, democracy, and cultural refinement” as well as “racial intolerance, institutionalized discrimination, anti-unionism, sexism, and social inequality” (p. 8) in what she terms an “emergent tradition” (p. 41). Harris analyses the “monthly columns, fiction, poetry, biography, photographs, and illustrations” (p. 11), often noting the representations of Blacks within its pages as uniquely positive for their time (pp. 22, 26, 31-32, 39-40), with the magazine’s illustrations capturing “the essence and purpose of the magazine: to provide Black children with a document that would make them proud” (p. 41).

In contrast to the selective tradition that Taxel describes, in which the assumptions and values that are conveyed are hidden, even potentially from the books’
own authors, the emergent tradition that Harris describes, is a deliberate, planned response. In this way, it is akin to Critical Race Theory’s “counterstories” which “challenge the perceived wisdom of those at society’s center by providing a context to understand and transform established belief systems” (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 36), which, like Critical Multiculturalism, challenge traditional power structures to “displace” them (Steinberg, et al. 2006). However, as Hall cautions, “attempting to dismantle or subvert a racialized regime of representation is an extremely difficult exercise” so there are “no absolute guarantees” (1997a, p. 276), and positive representation does not necessarily “displace the negative.” Because “binaries remain in place, meaning continues to be framed by them” (1997a, p.274), unfortunately, and these positive representations may not be enough.

The Selective Tradition in Teachers' Choice of Children's Literature: Does It Exist in the Elementary Classroom?

Jipson and Paley (1991) consider a selective tradition in children’s literature as well, particularly within school settings, drawing on the work of Williams, Taxel and others that say that educators tend to choose books that disregard marginalized groups which serves to justify their marginalization and “presents students with an ideologically biased, culturally exclusive, and ultimately false view of society” (p. 148). In their study, they surveyed 55 female “public and independent elementary school teachers from urban, suburban, and rural settings in Massachusetts, Wisconsin, and Oregon” of undisclosed racial identities, as to “the titles, authors, and main characters of three children's books
they had used in their classrooms during the past year” and the reasons for selecting those books (p. 150). Presenting a variety of the teacher’s responses that indicate instructional factors (pp. 152-153), personal aesthetic preferences (pp. 153-154), and concerns about “gender, race and equity” (pp. 154-156), they found that while book choice was careful and deliberate (156), gender and race bias was strong. To Jipson and Paley, of great concern was the bias of experienced teachers, who presumably should know and do better, advocating for deeper knowledge for teachers and more research on the interwoven reasons for book choice. While they are sensitive to the biases found in teachers’ book selection, even as they quote the teacher’s curricular concerns, they do not deeply analyze the social structures that inform the teachers’ biases or instructional decisions.

Towards a Theory of the Fairy-Tale Film: The Case of Pinocchio.

In much of his work, Zipes discusses how what he calls “the culture industry” (citing Horkheimer and Adorno for the term (Zipes, 1997, p. 6)) influences what is read and consumed by children. He is particularly interested in fairy tales, our cultural fascination with them (Zipes, 2012), and their deeper, oftentimes sinister meanings (Zipes, 1983; 1997). In his study of Disney’s Pinocchio (Zipes, 1996), he lays out his “five theses about the development of the fairy tale as film” (p. 1): 1) the popularity of folk tales relied on the talents of the storyteller to hold their listener in awe (p. 2), 2) while magic folk tales have existed much longer, the literary fairy tale as a genre relied on the printing press, which ultimately tied its production to conveying “the concerns of
aristocratic or middle-class authors to a select group of adult readers” (p. 2-3), 3) as the storyteller’s voice faded, the “family fairy tale” came into being, “designed to reinforce patriarchal notions of civilization” (p. 4), 4) as fairy tales moved into film, they further lost “the personal and communal voice of the oral magic tales,” instead gaining a voice that was “standardized and bent on selling itself in the form of a commodified fairy tale” (pp. 5-6), & 5) as film technology grew, there was the ability to create greater projects with the fairy tale and “the fairy tale as live-action film or animation has become one of the most successful genres in the culture industry” (pp. 6-7). According to Zipes, the 1930s films of Walt Disney set the model for many fairy tale films to come, with simplistic tales that rely on gender norms and a light/dark, good/evil dichotomy (pp. 6-7). His description of Disney’s *Pinocchio* begins by contextualizing the lives and ideas of both Collodi, the author of the novel, and Walt Disney. Zipes contemplates how Disney, and his studio, turned Pinocchio into “the American boy” (p. 17). In the end, he claims that “What was important for Disney was not the immediate and personal contact of a storyteller with a particular audience to share wisdom and induce pleasure, but the impact that he as creator could have on as large an audience as possible in order to sell a commodity and endorse ideological images that would enhance his corporate power” (pp. 19-20). In its celebration of both tradition and the new America, and its own commodification, this film “family fairy tale” reinforces gender roles and good behavior, continuing with the middle- and upper-class values of the selective tradition that the other authors examine.
Constructing the Canon of Children's Literature: Beyond Library Walls and Ivory Towers.

Anne Lundin’s 2004 book looked, not only at the selective tradition in children’s literature and the types of books and ideas that comprise it, but also the people who shape it. Critical of the function of the canon, which she says is to “position texts in relation to one another— and to exclude more than include” (p. xvii), she embarks on a historical study of the people who shape the selective tradition, contrasting librarians and scholars with the child reader.

First she traces the early history of children’s librarians, as well as their influences, and mentors, and claims that these librarians “took over the children’s book world in the first half of the twentieth century” and through “a mingling of social reform, a romantic spirit, a humanistic ideology, and a growing professionalism of women” “made their mark on the literature, especially on a high standard for children’s books, one equal or superior to general literature” (pp. 1-2), as they both responded to and crafted a hierarchy of literature. She extensively describes individual, world-changing children’s librarians, who she quotes Zipes as describing as “educated, white, middle-class women” (quote on p. 59). Lundin argues that a library is “an agency of cultural formation and social order” (p. 30), and names the “genteel culture” the children’s librarians deliberately promoted as an example of Williams’s selective tradition (p. 31-32). She also notes the synergy between these children’s librarians and the publishing industry in the development of children’s literature as a commodity (p. 49). Significant to this project is the advent of the Newbery and Caldecott awards that held a “Anglofied allure of history and tradition” (p. 51) and privileged children’s librarians as arbiters of quality,
and the subsequent controversies about the “gendered, romanticized image of childhood” found in the winning books (p. 52).

Next in her chronology, she describes the history and roles of scholars and formal reviewers of children’s literature, who were more focused on realism, and who, during the early history of children’s libraries stood in opposition to children’s librarians. As academic interest in popular culture grew and men entered the previously feminized field, “academics began to assume roles held by librarians as cultural critics” (p. 145). In the early 1980s, the Children’s Literature Association created a list of sixty-three “Touchstones” with corresponding critical essays, which Lundin argues “reveal how and what scholars privilege in the continuity of a selective tradition” (p. 68). Lundin devotes two or three paragraphs to summarizing each of these essays, and explains the controversies around their selection. Nodelman originally presented the list as a “canon,” but while he may have meant the “project as dialogue and curriculum,” coming at a time “when the field was awakening to new voices and new disciplines, the concept of a canon was problematic indeed” (p. 107). Attempting to find the place of the child reader within all of the noise of adults, she ends with theoretically grounded musings on her own history as a child reader. Stating that children’s books are an “adult re-creation of an earlier geography” (p. 117), she considers her own “paracanon” (p. 139) which is, itself, overwhelmingly white and upper-middle class focused.

Critiquing librarians’ and scholars’ “faith that evaluating children’s books with the same standards as adult books would position them within their institutions and the larger culture” and describing the shifting, situational nature of “cultural positioning, cultural validation” (p. 141), she advocates for multiple canons, with both fields creating
“a series of canons reflecting and constructing a variety of cultures and literatures for children” (p. 147). In a sense, the multiplicity of identity-focused awards may be these multiple canons, reflecting “a variety of cultures.” While this advocacy for multiple canons disrupts the hierarchies that the librarians and scholars created and held dear, placing her memory of herself as the child reader continues the Romantic tradition of glorifying the past that she seems to critique in her history of librarians. As she contrasts the selective tradition that masquerades as adult expertise about children’s needs, her consideration of childhood is still considered from an adult standpoint.

The All-White World of Children's Books

Nancy Larrick, a founder and former president of the International Reading Association (later the International Literacy Association), wrote an article for the Saturday Review interrogating what she called “the all-white world of children’s literature” (1965). Heeding the concerns of critics, children, and others, she surveyed “more than 5,000 trade books published for children” between 1963 and 1965, hoping to find more and better quality representations of African Americans than what was rumored to exist. Instead, she found that only 6.7% of the books she surveyed even included African Americans, and of those, only forty-four of the books told a story of African Americans beyond finding only African Americans in a larger crowd in the background of an illustration or outside of the contemporary United States (either outside of the country or well in the past) (p. 64). Among these, she finds very few to be realistic or of literary merit.
After describing a few of these, she shares the results of questions she asked publishers about their representations of African Americans, finding that they cited fear of negative opinions and decreased book sales, particularly from the Southern United States if they increased their representation of African Americans (p. 65). While a few could cite actual examples of upset customers, some editors were also surprised by their own lack of representations of contemporary African American children (p. 84). Larrick described the growing market of African American book buyers and commented that while large publishers were attempting to find ways to increase their representation of African Americans, Pepsi-Cola had created what she considered excellent educational materials addressing that market (pp. 84-85). While she wrote before Williams described the selective tradition, and of course doesn’t name it as such, she critiques the place of the “Ku Klux Klan” and “white supremacy” in deciding what and is not published, stating that things would change when “authors, editors, publishers, and booksellers decide that they need not submit to bigots” (p. 85).

In 2014, 49 years later, citing op-eds by Walter Dean Myers and his son, Christopher Myers about the dearth of children’s literature with African American characters, Cooperative Children’s Book Center’s director, Kathleen T. Horning informally researched the current state of affairs. After noting that there had been a rise in books published with African American characters, she commented on the plummet in such books that Walter Dean Myers had written about in 1984. Considering the current state of affairs, she saw that, of the 78.3 percent of children’s books that her center received that were actually about people, 10.5 percent were about people of color. Not specifying which races these people were or commenting on the fact that there were
fewer books about people of color than there were about animals, she considered the market forces that create the lack of representation of people of color, and ends by urging libraries, educators, and individuals to buy books with people of color in them, to create the wanted and needed change.

Put together, these studies shed light on how what is published and used pedagogically are part of a tradition that ignores people of color and values representations that justify negative treatment toward them. That the studies I was able to find on the selective tradition primarily focus on representations of a black and white racial binary also speaks to the work that needs to be done about other forms of human difference that often are not represented or are misrepresented.

**Children’s Literature Awards**

**Prizing Children's Literature: the Case of Newbery Gold**

After briefly considering literary prizing in general, through analyzing others’ work on the history of children’s literature, Kidd claims that the Newbery “has come to embody our ambivalence about distinction in the wake of progressive social movements, canon reform, and widespread faith that literature, especially that for children, should be an equal opportunity employer” (Kidd, 2007, p. 169). He considers children’s librarians who considered their work “as a form of public service as much as a modern profession” (p. 171), and who hoped that the Newbery Award would advance the standing of children’s literature. He describes the hopes that Newbery winners were “destined for
literary or proto-highbrow status,” but its eventual fate as a successful “middlebrow project beyond the specificity of its titles” with the winners “understood primarily as minor classics rather than as classics that children might read” (p. 173). Ironically, he notes that “the attempt to legitimize children’s literature through the Medal contributed to the ongoing separation of children’s and “serious”/adult literature” (p. 173) and that the medal launched literature that was “edubrow” as much as it was “middlebrow,” tying the work of librarians with that of teachers, both feminized professions (p. 175).

After historicizing and describing this status, Kidd examines the history of the Newbery winners. He says that for the first two decades, the winners were mostly “historical fiction, folklore, and comparative cultural fiction” “set in other countries and/or indigenous North American cultures,” but since the 1940s, books set in the contemporary white United States have been much more common (p. 177).

After considering how the original winners established “what was American” through their exoticized portrayals of other cultures and the American themes continued throughout, he points to the severe lack of “African Americans or their work” (p. 177), especially in relation to the valuable work that was being produced. In addition to the devaluing of African American culture, as he looks over Newbery winners, he also sees a theme of “universalist rhetoric of art and culture” (p. 180).

He looks to critiques of the award, agreeing with Bonnie J. F. Miller that the Newbery “slowly and inadequately adapted to social change” and with Aronson that newer prizes, such as the Coretta Scott King and Pura Belpré awards, “have shifted or at least pluralized the terms of distinction,” but he wonders if this is the “logical outcome of the Medal’s edubrow mission” (p. 182). He describes prizing as a paradox between “the
stuff of distinction and democratization” (p. 184). Is what is valued, valuable? Is what is valuable, valued? Who decides? In the recent shifts that he chronicles, the arbiters of what is valuable have changed. The implications for this value are still up in the air. As those who have been historically devalued are given a place to assess what they consider to be of value, is that valuing necessarily exclusive? As I examine books that have newly been recognized as valuable, often because of their representation of groups who have traditionally not been valued, Kidd’s work on the process of valuing works with Lemert’s idea of a recent crisis to guide my understanding of the constructed and temporal nature of those values.

Critical Reviews of Award-Winning Books

Ten Years of the Newbery Medal

As the oldest children’s book award, Newbery winners have received the most critical attention, both as unique, individual books, and through their prizing, as examples of a selective tradition. One of the earliest critics was Sophie L. Goldsmith (1931), who celebrated the founding of the award and its reliance on librarians (who are “in a position not only to judge the actual reading interests of children, but to make these as broad and fine as possible” (p. 310)) for choosing the winners, at the beginning of an article about the first ten years, and ten winners, of the Newbery. She describes each of the winners in a lively manner, not chronologically but thematically. Then she provides her hope that subsequent winners would be “books which give children conceptions of their own
country” (p. 314) and set in the present in response to the fact that only two of the
winners over the ten years had been set in the contemporary United States, because of her
belief (with which “Katherine Lord of Nantucket’s Little Book House” (p. 315) concurs)
that children want to read books that reflect what they know. She does not extend this
request for mirrors to reflect the diverse population of the United States, only stating that
it should reflect the current United States.

The Black Experience in Children's Fiction: Controversies Surrounding Award-winning
Books

In 1986, Taxel took a different stance towards award-winning books, looking at
three award-winning books for their representation of black people. After discussing the
difficulty of “neatly separating aesthetic values from moral and social/cultural values” (p. 250),
while also emphasizing the importance of literature with black characters that is
both “culturally authentic and aesthetically satisfying” (p. 251). He proposes that “if the
cultural or historical inaccuracies [in a text, particularly a cross-cultural text] serve no
literary purpose and result in a distorted or demeaning view of a people which
perpetuates negative attitudes toward that people and or feelings of superiority of another
group (e.g., whites) in relation to that people, it is the responsibilities of the critic to cite
this as a serious deficiency of the work” (p. 253)

As he begins his analysis of controversial Newbery-winning The Slave Dancer
and International Reading Association's Children's Book Award-winning Words by
Heart, against Newbery-winning Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry, he notes that in the
award manuals, “accuracy” and “non-racist” and “non-sexist” values are espoused.
However, there is no elaboration or guidance “which would assist committee members in gauging either truthfulness or authenticity, or in determining whether a book is racist or sexist” (p. 254). Then he examines how the sociology of school knowledge suggest that school “materials affect not only children's self-images but also their developing values, world views, and beliefs” (p. 254). He notes that research on the effects of specific negative texts had not been undertaken, but says it seems evident that “children's literature constitutes but one of a complex variety of sources which children draw upon when constructing their own particular conceptions of reality” (p. 255), relying on his and other’s beliefs in such effects, because of the prevalence of stereotypical and negative imagery and language in the “selective tradition” of children’s literature.

The first book he analyses is *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* by Mildred Taylor, which he contextualizes with her own acceptance speech for the Newbery medal, about the contrasts between the docile representations of African Americans that she encountered in books and the stories of struggle and pride that she found at home, before presenting the plot and an analysis of Taylor’s craft, concluding that her “success… is a function of her considerable literary talent and the fact that she writes about what she herself experienced, or learned of firsthand” (p. 261). He contrasts it directly to Ouida Sebestyen’s *Words by Heart*, initially describing their similarities, and then noting specific details that indicate a negative attitude to blackness, inaccurate details, and the sense of shame and passivity that the adults uphold, as well as the weakness of the writing.

Much more briefly, Taxel described the premise of Paula Fox’s *The Slave Dancer*, and then describes critical responses to the book’s implication of Africans in the
slave trade, the lack of explicit condemnation of slavery, and the use of ugly and stereotypical words and ideas about Africans. While he agrees that it is factually true that the book contains the elements that critics find problematic, he contextualizes these things as what a white boy would hear and how he might react to witnessing and experiencing trauma, claiming that the literary merit of the book would be jeopardized by a character that directly critiqued the ideas that were considered normal in the setting of the book. Instead, he presents the idea that “the slave trade as a monstrous crime against humanity” is strongly presented, which is important, but that a more important and necessary novel is one “which will allow young people to bear witness to the ways that the millions of African people themselves struggled to retain their dignity and humanity” (p. 271). Although he cites some critics’ concerns about the potential ill effects of the cruel words and stereotypes on the child reader, he states that “the potentially negative effects of these troublesome inaccuracies and deficiencies were mitigated when considered in relation to the novel as a whole and by an appreciation of its point of view” (p. 272). He does not consider the ways the extreme experiences can be viewed as relics of the past, while the stereotypical words and ideas continue in many ways, and their problematic elements could be ignored or internalized, and even used as a justification for the extreme treatment, by a contemporary reader.

Locating the books within Rudine Sims’ categories of either “culturally conscious” or “social conscience” books, he advocates for more culturally conscious books. He states that while these books could be written by writers of any race, a writer working cross-racially would need to reflect on their motives and do deep research, for the books to be valuable. He also cautions against overly prescriptive or restrictive
publishing or library policies that would verge on totalitarian moralizing or limiting censorship. Although he considers the potential effects of literature on children very important, he is fairly dismissive of the concerns critics raised about The Slave Dancer’s language’s potential effects on readers. Without consulting children, considering the effects of books on them is necessarily only theoretical.

The Newbery Medal: Books about Africa

Yenika-Agbaw analyzed the representation of Africa in books honored by the Newbery Medal committee (2009). She begins by describing the Newbery award and its prestige, citing Kidd and Taxel’s critiques of Newbery winners, and critiquing the lack of concern about “cultural merit” in the awards criteria which has led to some inaccurate cultural information in award winning books (p. 18). Then she lays out the Newbery award criteria, before explaining that although no medals had gone to books set in Africa between the award’s inception in 1922 until the time of her research in 2009, but that there were three honor books set in Africa: The Cow-Tail Switch and Other West African Stories by Harold Courlander and George Herzog, published in 1947 and republished in 1974, and Nancy Farmer’s 1994 The Ear, the Eye, and the Arm and 1996 A Girl Named Disaster. She justifies her inclusion of the 1947 book of folk tales, which some could consider irrelevant, because “unfortunately, when Africa is the subject, most teachers' choice of literature is folktales” including those found in The Cow-Tail Switch and Other West African Stories and “as simple and direct as folktales may seem to readers, they are
capable of eliciting certain sentiments about cultures alien to readers - sentiments readers might not be aware that they harbor” (Yenika-Agbaw, 2009, p. 19).

Yenika-Agbaw presents a description of each book, including its layout. Her presentation of Courlander and Herzog’s folktale collection begins by situating it within the conventions of folktales, before briefly describing the gender dynamics, the layout of the book, and a summary of the title story. Then she critiques the antiquated language in the rerelease and the stereotypical illustrations, before stating that overall the book is “enjoyable” (p. 21), and describing transformative comparative and research projects that a teacher could engage students in. She describes The Ear, the Eye, and the Arm with a lengthy synopsis and a note about the many kinds of questions the book elicits. She reminds the reader of other issues within the text, such as gender representation and colonial relations, suggesting questions and ideas for classroom use. She gives another detailed but concise description of A Girl Named Disaster, citing Martin’s description of the protagonist as a “Cinderella character” and her own “enthrall”ment with the character, as well as her pleasure about the way the choice of setting helps to “capture the complexity of the African reality” (p. 23), again suggesting questions and analysis.

After these descriptions, she points out that the books invite discussions of cultural authenticity and suggests that “by paying attention to specific cultural markers in the texts” readers can “become socially responsible global citizens” who “may be able to revise their preconceptions… even their attitudes” (p. 24). In service of teaching this kind of global citizenship, she suggests four activities that utilize efferent reading, and three that focus on an aesthetic and critical reading. Her critique of these books points to some of the stereotypic representations available within the selective tradition of what
books are available and valued, but suggests ways that teachers and young people can exercise agency in interacting with both stereotyped and more authentic representations.

“Other” Characters: The Gendering and Racialization of “Disability” within Newbery Award-winning Books, 1922-2012

Very recently, Nelson & Nelson (2016) published a quantitative analysis of the ways that gender, race, and disability intersect in Newbery award winners. They critique a previous study’s definition of disability in Newbery winners as inadequate before describing the perils of overmedicalization, the intricacies of contextualization of disability, and the conventions of children’s literature in determining how to define who is disabled in a children’s book. This elides into a list of many racist and offensive terms found in older Newbery winners and the ways that the dehumanizing terms used also promote a lack of disability as desirable. Like Yenika-Agbaw, they justify the importance of the study of older books because these books can gain “particular lustre when endowed with ‘classic’ status” (Nelson & Nelson, 2016, p. 82).

Their methods section begins with a description of how they defined disability, using “the social model of disability that is expressed within the United Nations’ Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities” (p. 83). Both authors read each book twice to evaluate for evidence of impairments, using a somewhat cyclical definition of impairment that “allowed for the inclusion of any character, named or unnamed, who was described as having at least one visible and/or invisible impairment” (Nelson & Nelson, 2016, p. 83), and then they “evaluated whether each character with an impairment was depicted as ‘disabled’” (p. 84). The United Nations definition that they
used for disability in particular describes how disability results in the denial of “status equality” (Fraser, 2001, p. 25), as they quote it as “hindered from full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others” (Nelson & Nelson, 2016, p. 83). In addition to disability, they recorded changes in a character’s disability within the story, racial identity, gender, and role. In their analysis, they share statistics of intersectional representation, with examples.

Nelson and Nelson share disability, race, gender, and type combinations numerically, and break those down into the types of representation of those categories. They use phrases such as “overwhelmingly depicted” (p. 86) and “extremely rare” (p. 87) to describe the types of representations of the quantified groups. Age, naming, and work all come into their findings, but none of these are quantified in the same way that race, gender, and disability are, but they are used to provide texture to the analysis. In their final analysis, they describe how nearly half of the characters who were disabled were also “Othered and presented as ‘roleless’” (p. 94) with that type of representation more likely for female characters. They find “females more likely to be portrayed as fungible than either heroic or villainous” (p. 95), attributing this passivity to traditional gender roles. In addition, “racialized characters with impairments most often appear as unnamed background characters and in ways that accord with the stereotype of a villain” (p. 96). Their use of impairment and disability as having different meanings is not presented clearly, and they include obesity and baldness as impairments or disabilities, simultaneously presenting those qualities as problems, even as they critique representations of specific types of bodies as undesirable.
Already on the Shelf: Queer readings of Award-winning Children’s Literature

Caitlin L. Ryan and Jill M. Hermann-Wilmarth utilized queer theory in their reading of four award-winning children’s books, two of which were Newbery winners (2013). After presenting the challenges and importance of queer children’s literature in classrooms, they embark upon a study of books that are well-respected and not generally considered queer, to “offer possible analyses of these well-known books to demonstrate how students and teachers can use a queer lens to create alternate interpretations of familiar texts and highlight often unspoken moments in all kinds of stories that could have multiple, inclusive, or even transgressive meanings” (p. 145).

In their description of queer theory, they explain how it brings together the dual definitions of queer as both nonheterosexual and also strange, “focusing on the relationship between” identities that are considered “normal” and those that are considered “strange,” while realizing that stable-seeming “binary categories of identity” are “actually messy, slippery, and always in flux (i.e., strange)” (p. 145). They argue that queer theory speaks to both gender identity and sexuality, particularly because, in their context, “although sexuality may not regularly or explicitly be an identity category applied to children, gender—in all its normative pink-and-blueness—certainly is” (p. 147) and “the binary commonly used to label sexuality masks how both hetero- and homosexuality are both constructed, diverse categories” (p. 147).

Not only that, they argue that using queer theory is an important practice generally, because “it can also remind readers how much more may be available in texts than what school teaches us to look for and understand” (p. 148). If a teacher’s intention
is to subvert traditional school practices with their students, this is compelling. However, if a teacher or administrator’s intention is to uphold those practices, it may make queer theory seem doubly troubling, even with its lack of focus on sex.

Each book receives a different treatment to “underscore that there is not a uniform way to put the diversity of queer theory to use when reading” (p. 145), and is followed by two sets of questions. The first “help teachers expand their own readings and learn to see traditional texts through a queer lens” and the second “help connect the queer aspects of those books with the lives of readers” (p. 150).

Their “page-by-page analysis” of both the text and illustrations of Caldecott-winning *Where the Wild Things Are* (p. 151) leads the authors to discuss how their “reading of Max and his journey such as we’ve suggested here could lead teachers and students to reflect on other literary characters’ and our own (queer or outlaw) performances of self in various contexts and categories” (p. 154), suggesting that teachers also look to other “texts where characters make literal and figurative journeys in response to their treatment in their everyday worlds” (p. 154). The article does not state which award *The Other Side* by Jacqueline Woodson won, although it has received at least eleven regional and national honors (Woodson, 2018). They take a “holistic approach” to their reading of Woodson’s book (Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2013, p. 155), examining “the less obvious roles of desire and subversion around gender and sexuality, particularly in how they play out in intersection with” the more commonly examined “racial subjectivities” of the book (p. 156). They believe that their reading “opens the possibility for students and teachers to queer the stories of relationships that have been socially constructed in ways that create and highlight intentional borderlands” both in terms of
gender and race, finding power in rule breaking, and could be used for other texts where characters “challenge the notion of ‘this is just the way things are’” (p. 158).

The final two books the authors analyze are winners of the Newbery medal. Using a “thematic approach” to examine Kate DiCamillo’s *The Tale of Despereaux*, they find that Despereaux’s deviance “calls into question traditional and taken-for-granted notions of love, bodies, and desire” (p. 162), and that such a queer reading can be used in the classroom with texts about “forbidden love,” “stories where characters don’t fit into their families,” and “stories where characters resist having their lives and interests predetermined by the specifics of their identity” (p. 162). With a “gendered analysis” of *Bridge to Terabithia* by Katherine Paterson, they see that “gender gets regulated as a part of a larger desire to control sexuality generally and maintain a normative heterosexuality more specifically” (p. 165), proposing that even though it could be read as a heterosexual love story, teachers using a queer reading could also “expand traditional notions of gender and desire by noticing and foregrounding all the negotiations and complications around gender and sexuality present in the text” (p. 166). They suggest that such a reading could be used with “books where either (a) the characters are marginalized because they don’t conform to binary gender norms or (b) the characters’ plot line relies on their adherence to gender norms” (p. 166).

They conclude the article by sharing their insights from studying this kind of reading in action. While these practices are promising and inviting, the lines between a simply poststructuralist reading and a queer reading are smudged, and the element of queerness that is actually about GLBT identity is sometimes overly ignored. For example they assert that the characters, none of whom have sexual orientations delineated in their
texts, are “non-LGBT characters” who can be read in “queer ways” (p. 168). Maurice Sendak and Jacqueline Woodson have both had long-term same-sex partnerships, and at least Sendak’s sexuality was known at the time of the writing of the article, which adds texture to the queer readings. An author’s GLBT identity does not necessitate a queer reading of their text, but a queer reading without acknowledgment of queer authorship, whether intentional or not, is ironic.

An Author as a Counter-storyteller: Applying Critical Race Theory to a Coretta Scott King Award Book

Coretta Scott King award winners have been analyzed with multiple lenses and theories, but most notably for this study, in 2009, Wanda Brooks analyzed the 2002 winner, The Land by Mildred Taylor, using Critical Race Theory “as an interpretive tool for examining the ways Taylor embeds meanings of land ownership into the novel” (p. 34). Brooks situates the novel within African American children’s literary traditions and its popular genre of historical fiction. She also contextualizes it in relation to the novels to which it is a prequel, their critical and popular reception, and the stated and implied intentions of the author to “present... readers with a rival portrait of African American life” “in a personalized legacy” in contrast to “non-African American and even other African American authors” (p. 36).

She describes her use of Critical Race Theory, its importance, and the tenets that address “counterstorytelling,” “property ownership in the United States and the privileging of Whites as a racial group,” and “the continued manifestation of racism in contemporary society” (p. 38). In this analysis, she found themes of “inspiration and
adoration,” “entitlement and privilege,” and “freedom and security” (pp. 34, 39), which she describes in relation both to the tenets of Critical Race Theory and the historical contexts of the books, before concluding that Critical Race Theory opens up educational opportunities for “issues of race and racism in the past and present” (p. 43). As she pulls historical knowledge from multiple sources into her analysis, while the book does have these educational possibilities, even with a Critical Race Theory orientation, to fully understand the issues of racism addressed in the book, it may not stand alone without deep historical research on the part of the teacher or students.

**Analysis of Latino Award Winning Children’s Literature**

Few studies critically examine winners of the Pura Belpré award, but Jeff Gomm, Melissa Ann Heath, and Pat Mora (2017) present the themes of 72 award winning “Latino children’s books,” suggesting that such books could be useful as bibliotherapy for “Latino immigrant children in US public schools” who need support “because of challenges they have experienced before, during, and/or after immigrating to the US” (p. 512). They present the number of books that present specific immigrant challenges, without giving any indication of the quality of the presentation of those challenges other than the titles of the six that earned a 1 from *The Horn Book Guide*. They also do not consider the characters’ responses to those challenges or their strengths. With these numbers, they suggest a “prescriptive list” available in appendices, for adults to use in considering titles (p. 517). Similarly, Amy Cummins (2014) presents *Yaqui Delgado Wants to Kick Your Ass* as a case study for bullying education, and while she describes
some imperfections, she primarily advocates for its use in a classroom setting, because of the importance of the theme.

Disabling Assumptions: Teaching Disability Studies with Five Flavors of Dumb

Due to its relative newness as an award, Schneider Family Book awards are similarly undertheorized. In, “Disabling Assumptions,” a regular column in English Journal, guest columnist Alisha M. White (2015) suggests how teachers might use Five Flavors of Dumb, which won the award in 2011, to teach Disability Studies. Describing it as a rare book that has a “protagonist with a disability who is ‘normal,’ clever, likable, and successful,” she recommends it for its portrayal of “life with a disability both realistically and positively while avoiding stereotypes” (p. 68). She advocates Schneider winners in general, because due to the criteria that “weed out characters who are exaggerated or stereotyped or whose only purpose is to represent the disability,” the books “[normalize disability] so that it is no longer out of the ordinary or something to be ashamed of and hide” (p. 68). She uses three questions adapted from the awards criteria to analyze the representation of disability within the novels, suggesting that a teacher use and teach the book with those questions, and giving a description of the responses to the novel the preservice teachers she taught. Her response focuses primarily on the importance of making disability seem normal, but within that description of normal, she emphasizes that the character has exceptional skills that set her apart.
Representations in Award-winning LGBTQ Young Adult Literature from 2000–2013

While the Stonewall award has only very recently been eligible to children’s literature, Laura M. Jimenez writes about both the similarly "LGBTQ” focused Lambda Award and the Stonewall award children’s literature winners from 2000 through 2013 (2015). While children’s literature was not explicitly eligible for the Stonewall award until 2010, those 2010-2013 winners are included in Jimenez’s study. She contextualizes her study within the historical lack of representation of multicultural characters and the beginning of the “WeNeedDiverseBooks” campaign, but notes the lack of lesbian characters within “LGBTQ YA literature” (p. 409).

With the goal of developing “a comprehensive and nuanced evaluation of this group of novels” (p. 410), Jimenez engaged in mixed methods for her study, with three coders reading the books twice, coding them for demographics on the first reading, and asking open-ended questions about the theme and resolution of the text. She presents the quantitative analysis, which describes the plots and characters of the books that feature non-White characters, before the qualitative, in which she presents findings from a sample of the texts. She details her results as to the “predominance of White, male characters,” “the general and predictable tone of the few award-winning novels that feature lesbian protagonists,” and “the lack of bisexual characters” (p. 418). While a goal of her study is shedding “light on how these novels are representing the gay community” (p. 410), her conclusion indicts the lack of representation of people of color and bisexual characters, but while her qualitative examples are interesting, they do not give an understanding of the overall representation of trends of “the kinds of stories being told,
their predictability, and the tone of their endings” (p. 415) that are represented and valued by the awards.

These studies are invaluable, in that they begin to examine how specific groups are presented and understood within books that win awards. They present both guidelines for the study of such books and important insights into what is currently valued. However, each study only takes up one form of representation, missing intersectional opportunities to understand what is valued in representations of difference. Some give examples of how these books might be used in the classroom, but I was unable to find studies about how award-winning books, because they are award-winning books, are actively used in classrooms.

The present study examines how books that have won awards, particularly awards that are about difference, fit within a selective tradition that has typically justified poor treatment of those who are considered racially different. I also analyse how the awards, which are typically celebrated for their positive representations of difference, capture the experience of difference, intersectionally and critically multiculturally, rather than through single-axis frameworks that have typically been used. In the following chapter, I begin that examination with an overview of the history of the American Library Association, followed by the criteria that guide the selection of the award-winners.
Chapter 3

The American Library Association and Its Award Criteria

Children’s books are often valued for what they can teach children. Publishers and booksellers market while parents, teachers, and librarians choose books that they believe will impart important knowledge and wisdom to their children. What is sold and bought is part of a selective tradition that passes itself off as what has always been, but is actually chosen. The idea of what has always been “is intended to connect with and ratify the present” (Williams, 1977, pp. 115-116), justifying itself as factual truth, rather than a deliberate choice.

Traditionally, children’s book publishing and prizing has valued the dominant cultures of white monolingual nondisabled straight European Americans. However, starting formally with the foundation of the Coretta Scott King award in 1970, the American Library Association has been forced to question and confront some of its cultural biases. The criteria for the Coretta Scott King award, as well as the other identity focused awards, shed some light onto the considerations that are used to, at least to some degree, displace the values that have been taken for granted.

In this chapter, I ask: What are the criteria for the selection of the winning books of the Coretta Scott King, Pura Belpré, Schneider, and Stonewall awards? How do they address difference as a concept? How do they differ from the criteria of the Newbery award? In examining these questions, I look at the history of the American Library
Association and its awards, while providing a brief overview of the award criteria, then I study the criteria of the Coretta Scott King, Pura Belpré, Schneider, and Stonewall for how they conceptualize difference, before examining the Newbery and how its criteria correspond to ideas of difference and normalcy.

The American Library Association Children’s Librarians

Founded in 1876 (American Library Association, 2016a), “the oldest and largest library association in the world” (American Library Association, 2018b), the American Library Association (ALA) focused, very early in its history, on library resources for children, with Caroline Hewins as an early advocate for this work. All in 1882, Hewins initiated the first story hour for children and one of the first children’s collections, as well as producing the first ALA publication, Books for the Young (American Library Association, 2016a; Kidd, 2007). Although it is generally associated with “white women of genteel or middle-class backgrounds” (Kidd, 2007, p. 171), the American Library Association, started out with 13 women and 90 men (American Library Association, 2016a). Its continuing mission has been “to provide leadership for the development, promotion and improvement of library and information services and the profession of librarianship in order to enhance learning and ensure access to information for all” (American Library Association, 2018b).

The inclusion of women in the founding history of the Association leads the ALA to claim that “working with people of all races and sexes has been a goal since early in ALA history” (American Library Association, 2018a), but historically, the organization
has been overwhelmingly white. While the goal of the organization may have been “working with” a diverse group of people, this goal may also have been more as a “form of public service” (Kidd, 2007, p. 171) than an inclusive endeavor. In its focus on traditional and academic standards of evaluation, children’s librarians primarily crafted and utilized a selective tradition in which “the best” (Lundin, 2004, p. 3) books were prescribed “to change lives” (p. 22). Librarians were presumed to be the “cultural authority” on children’s literature explicitly because of their gender (p. 2), and they used this position to shape “the moral and intellectual life” of both children and adults (p. 31). Cheryl Knott Malone argues that “despite the rhetoric of open access and intellectual freedom that developed over the course of the twentieth century, library collections reflected the knowledge (as well as the ignorance) and values of the largely Caucasian/Anglo middle-class librarians who dominated the profession” (2000, p. 78).

Nonetheless children’s librarians were not always white. In 1921, Pura Belpré joined the staff at the New York Public Library, “pioneer[ing] bilingual storytelling and library services to Spanish-speaking children in New York City” (Horning, 2015, p. 8). Six years later, Charlamae Hill Robbins became a children’s librarian at Chicago Public Library, and over the course of her career, she led “the charge against the stereotypical portrayal of African Americans in children’s books” (p. 8), insisting that the ALA “not hold meetings in segregated cities” (Streeter, 1993), and becoming the first African American to be president of ALA’s Children’s Services Division (Horning, 2015, p. 9). Augusta Baker began her career with New York Library in 1937 in Harlem, becoming “nationally known for her storytelling and leadership in children’s librarian services” (p. 8).
These and many other librarians of color have worked for more multicultural, equitable, and inclusive libraries, but there is a noticeable lack of scholarly work on the multicultural history of the ALA (Wiegand, 2000, p. 12), with most that does exist “focused on African-American librarians and on libraries serving historically black institutions and neighborhoods” (Malone, 2000, p. 79). Like many challenges to the status quo this work toward multicultural equity and inclusion has been hard work, as librarians of color have “struggled against racist policies and practices” (Malone, 2000, p. 80), while working to emphasize and redefine the ALA’s focus on “social responsibilities” (Yamashita, 2000, p. 89).

The American Library Association’s Children’s Book Awards

In 1921, Frederic G. Melcher, editor of Publishers Weekly, established the John Newbery Medal, which, according to his formal agreement with the ALA Executive Board, was established

To encourage original creative work in the field of books for children. To emphasize to the public that contributions to the literature for children deserve similar recognition to poetry, plays, or novels. To give those librarians, who make it their life work to serve children’s reading interests, an opportunity to encourage good writing in this field (cited in American Library Association, 2015f).

Lundin writes that Melcher’s intention for the awards was also to “stimulate the supply of new books by native writers” (2004, p. 49). While on one level, the Newbery was established to add legitimacy to children’s literature, in its “middlebrow” (Kidd, 2007, p.
170) and “edubrow” (p. 174) project, “the Newbery Medal helped establish the modern awards system for children’s literature, in the process ensuring that ALA librarians would continue to serve as tastemakers” (Kidd, 2007, pp. 168-169). The American Library Association has presented the John Newbery Medal to “the most distinguished American children's book published the previous year” since 1922 (American Library Association, 2015f), and the Caldecott Medal to “the artist of the most distinguished American picture book for children” since 1938 (American Library Association, 2015g).

Presently, in their deliberations for the Newbery award, committee members are encouraged to consider elements such as “Interpretation of the theme or concept,” “Presentation of information including accuracy, clarity, and organization,” “Development” and “Delineation” of plot, character and settings, and “Appropriateness of style,” with the caveat that “the committee need not expect to find excellence in each of the named elements” because “the literary qualities to be considered will vary depending on content” (although “the book should, however, have distinguished qualities in all of the elements pertinent to it”). Committee members are told to consider each book for its “excellence of presentation for a child audience” and “as a contribution to American literature” (Association for Library Service to Children, 2016a). In an over 60 page document, committee members learn the history of the award, their roles and expectations, and how to present the importance of the committee work to their employers, emphasizing the award’s prestige (Association for Library Service to Children, 2015).

In her critique of the first ten years of Newbery winners, Goldsmith complained, “American writers for children seem to have derived their most effective inspirations
from foreign countries” and from the past (1931, p. 314). While Kidd (2007) notes that “Goldsmith didn’t see that the early titles affirm WASP American society precisely by depicting other cultures as exotic, primitive, and ‘historical’” (pp. 176-177), he suggests that by the 1940s, “she likely would have been pleased” (p. 177), as the books that received the Newbery Medal began to most commonly have “decidedly American settings and themes” (p. 178).

However, even though there were quality books by and about African Americans at the time and in 1941 Charlemae Rollins published a list of recommended books that countered the negative images of African Americans prevalent in children’s books (Horning, 2015, p. 8) the settings and themes honored by the Newbery award did not reflect the lives of Americans of color. Even though African Americans wrote and published novels, some of which were given Newbery Honors, African American librarians such as Charlemae Rollins and Augusta Baker gained higher positions, and the Interracial Books for Children newsletter began publication in 1966 (Horning, 2015, p. 9), no Newbery Medals were given to writers of color until Virginia Hamilton won in 1975 (Botelho & Rudman, 2009, pp. 76-77), with only three African American writers to win the medal in the twentieth century (Bishop, 2007, p. 50). The Newbery is “the highest possible honor in children’s literature” (Pinkney, 2001, p. 536), but its winners have continued to “by default, reflect a white experience” (Lindsay, 2015a), although some promising change has occurred since 2015.

The American Library Association followed the Newbery and Caldecott awards with the Laura Ingalls Wilder Medal, an award not given to one book, but to an author whose “books published in the United States have contributed significantly to children’s
literature during a period of at least ten years” in 1954 (Botelho & Rudman, p. 296), and then the Mildred L. Batchelder Award in 1968 for publishers “translating and publishing in the United States children’s books originally published in other languages and countries” (Botelho & Rudman, 2009, p. 296).

Then, finally, in 1970, the first Coretta Scott King Award, which explicitly honors “the work of African American writers and artists,” was awarded by a group of members of the American Library Association, but it wasn’t until 1982 that it “became an official award of the ALA” (Bishop, 2007, p. 90). The award was “the result of a discussion between two librarians, Glyndon Flynt Greer and Mabel McKissack, and the publisher John Carroll” coming from “the observation that no African American author had ever been honored by the prestigious Newbery and Caldecott awards” (Smith, 2004, p. ix). The award has been presented “annually to outstanding African American authors and illustrators of books for children and young adults that demonstrate an appreciation of African American culture and universal human values” (American Library Association, 2015e), although until 1982, the award wasn’t officially recognized by the Executive Board of the American Library Association, when the award committee was made a part of the Social Responsibilities Round Table (Smith, 2004, p. ix).

The Coretta Scott King award criteria state that the award is for “outstanding inspirational and educational contributions” by African Americans that “portray some aspect of the black experience, past, present, or future,” and are written (and illustrated, if it is illustrated) “by an African American.” Quality standards that award winners must meet include “Clear plot,” “Well drawn characters” who develop during the story, age appropriate writing style, and “Accuracy.” Also, the criteria state that “particular
attention will be paid to titles which seek to motivate readers to develop their own attitudes and behaviors as well as comprehend their personal duty and responsibility as citizens in a pluralistic society” (American Library Association, 2016e). The awards bylaws delineate the criteria as well as the roles of individual members.

Latinx children’s books have historically been “limited to a few publishers,” mostly small presses, because “many larger publishers preferred to publish Spanish translations of well-known children’s books written originally in English by mainstream authors” (Ada, 2016, p. xvi). The American Library Association trailed behind the inceptions of the Consortium of Latin American Studies Programs’s 1993 Américas Book Award and the Texas State University College of Education’s 1995 Tomás Rivera Mexican American Children’s Book Award (Botelho & Rudman, 2009, p. 300-301), finally establishing its Pura Belpré Award in 1996 to acknowledge Latinx writers and illustrators (Botelho & Rudman, 2009, p. 301). Oralia Garza de Cortés and Sandra Rios Balderrama were the two librarians who began the Pura Belpré Award, believing that “books with diverse imagery and portrayals of the Latino child’s experience were desperately needed to fulfill the library’s accountability to Latino patrons and to make the library accessible to the broader public” (Treviso, 2006, p. xiii). In creating the award, they were inspired by the way the “African American library community had claimed their own documentation, creation, and illustration with the Coretta Scott King Award” (p. xiv). The following year, Pat Mora founded Día de los niños/Día de los libros to celebrate literacy and bilingualism (Horning, 2015, p. 10). However, it was not until 2009 that Margarita Engle, a Latina author, received a Newbery Honor, and no Newbery awards have been given to Latinx authors (Horning, 2015, p. 11).
The Pura Belpré award’s stated intention is to annually honor a book by a Latinx person that “portrays, affirms and celebrates the Latino cultural experience.” Much of the criteria is identical to that of the Newbery award, with added emphasis on a book’s “portrayal of the Latino cultural experience,” stating explicitly that “Particular attention will be paid to cultural authenticity” (Association for Library Service to Children, 2016b). Like the Newbery award, the manual includes a suggested letter for employers, stating that the work of the committee is to “encourage Latino authors and illustrators in their efforts to produce children’s works celebrating the Latino experience in the United States” (Association for Library Service to Children and REFORMA: The National Association to Promote Library Services to Latinos and the Spanish-Speaking, 2015, p. 54).

After this, the American Library Association established other awards that were not focused on identity, such as the Michael L. Printz award in 2002 and the Theodore Seuss Geisel Book Award in 2004 (Botelho & Rudman, 2009, p. 298). Meanwhile, other organizations have honored books about populations that the American Library Association’s awards have not focused on. In 1948, the Jewish Book Council began presenting its National Jewish Book Awards to authors and illustrators in the United States and Canada who produce “children’s books of Jewish content” (Botelho & Rudman, 2009, p. 300), and in 1968, the Association of Jewish Libraries established its Sydney Taylor Book Award for books that “authentically depict the Jewish experience” (p. 300). In 2006, the Asian/Pacific American Librarian Association and the American Indian Library Association established awards for children’s books that represented their cultures (Botelho & Rudman, 2009, p. 300-302), and in 2008, the Chinese American
Librarians Association established an award to “promote Chinese American culture and heritage” (CALA, 2015b). These are not listed in formal lists of American Library Association awards.

In 2004, the American Library Association began awarding the Schneider Family Book Award to “honor an author or illustrator for a book that embodies an artistic expression of the disability experience for child and adolescent audiences” (American Library Association, 2015c), four years after the Council for Exceptional Children established its Dolly Gray Children’s Literature Award for portrayals of “individuals with developmental disabilities” (Council for Exceptional Children, 2010). The award was endowed by Katherine Schneider, a clinical psychologist who is blind, in honor of her family. She created the award as a response to the lack of positive and dynamic representations of disability in the books of her own childhood (Schneider in Schneider Family Book Award manual, 2014).

Unlike the Coretta Scott King and Pura Belpré award, there are no specifications for the Schneider award about the identity of the author or illustrator of a winning text; in fact the idea that an author could also have a disability is not always considered plausible. “The protagonist or a secondary character” can be “the person with the disability” in the text. While “books with death as a main theme are generally disqualified,” the definition of disability is also loose, and Schneider is quoted as saying that the book “must portray some aspect of living with a disability, whether the disability is physical, mental, or emotional,” with the committee given ownership over what that means. Other criteria include that the book “must portray the emotional, mental, or physical disability as part of a full life, not as something to be pitied,” the characters with disabilities should be
represented in a way that is “realistic, avoiding exaggeration or stereotypes” and that they should be “integral to the presentation, not merely a passive bystander.” Quality writing, with emphasis given to “distinctive use of language for plot and character development and setting delineation,” age appropriateness, and accuracy are also to be considered (Schneider Family Book Award manual, 2014).

The first young adult novel to directly address “a gay encounter” was published in 1969, the same year as the Stonewall Riots, both of which seemed to open up the open acknowledgment of GLBT identity (Abate & Kidd, 2011, p. 145). Very recently, “homosexuality has become nearly a mainstream topic in YA literature” but representations of GLBT identity for young children are very rare, and have primarily been shown through family members, rather than young protagonists (Abate & Kidd, 2011, pp. 5-6). In 1990, its second year, the Lambda Literary Awards, which “identify and honor the best lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender books in their year of publication” gave their first young adult/children’s award (Lambda Literary, 1990; Lambda Literary, 2016). The American Library Association had established what would become its Stonewall Book award in 1986, but it didn’t start awarding a Children’s and Young Adult award until 2010 (American Library Association, 2015d).

While all of the awards manuals provide information and guidance on governance and procedures, the manual of the Stonewall award gives only that procedural information. While the award is for the “the best books with gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender themes” and “English-language books of exceptional merit relating to the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender experience,” what that merit entails or does not entail is not described (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Round Table, 2016b).
Procedures for Book Nomination

Each award has its own nomination or recommendation process. The Newbery award manual emphasizes the expectation that each member of the award committee should have access to all books that may be eligible to win the award, because of their affiliation with libraries. Nonetheless, they also allow committee members to accept, and encourage publishers to “submit works for consideration,” while formally prohibiting conflicts of interest (Association for Library Service to Children, 2012, p. 16). Early in committee members’ service, they read “as many eligible books as possible,” and then “in the latter half of the year, each committee nominates a total of 7 books,” which “each member is [then] responsible for reading” (p. 19). For the Pura Belpré awards, “suggestions from the ALSC and REFORMA membership-at-large are an important source of titles” (Association for Library Service to Children and REFORMA: The National Association to Promote Library Services to Latinos and the Spanish-Speaking, 2015, p. 27), and while they also receive submissions from publishers, like Newbery committee members, they are expected to utilize their affiliations with libraries to access all eligible titles (p. 24). They have a nomination process that is similar to the Newbery, but they have multiple nomination periods which “[focus] attention on particular titles,” but do “not limit the committee’s reading” (p. 27). The Schneider award manual tells its committee members that they must both “search for books to bring to the Jury’s attention by reading professional journals and publishers’ catalogs, and by networking with colleagues individually or through listservs” and “read and evaluate all books mailed to
Jury members” (Schneider Family Book Award manual, 2014). Nominated and suggested books are requested from publishers to be mailed to committee members.

On the other hand, while the Coretta Scott King award Jury accepts submissions from publishers as well, submitters must use a form and “wait for further instructions” or their books will not be considered (American Library Association, 2016b). The guidance given to the committee implies that only these submitted texts are considered, as new members are encouraged to review the guidelines of the award before they “begin receiving books” in January (The Ethnic Multicultural Information Exchange Round Table, 2016, p. 6).

The stance on publishers submitting material is least clear for the Stonewall, whose criteria state that recommendations are accepted from anyone, but that “recommendations will not be accepted from the publisher of a proposed title,” and yet “publisher’s representatives may contact the Committee Chair and make them aware of titles that may be of interest to the Committee, or may send unsolicited copies to the Committee members” (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Round Table, 2016b).

The history of the awards give insight into the intentions behind the awards. The high status of the Newbery awards and its lack of diverse representation led to a perceived need for awards that valued particular communities who had previously been neglected. The American Library Association led the charge in awarding children’s books for quality, and even in awarding African American children’s books, although the Newbery took far too long to recognize an African American author. However, they lagged behind other organizations in awarding children’s literature with Latinx characters, characters with disabilities, and openly lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender
characters. Lemert described “the crisis” the year before the Pura Belpre award came into being. The Coretta Scott King Award had been established for 25 years, but the American Library Association’s formal recognition of the different and many worlds beyond the mainstream has been very slow.

**Procedures for Committee Member Nomination**

With the exception of the Schneider Family Book Award, each award is under the umbrella of specific divisions, round tables, or affiliates of the American Library Association, and the committee members who choose the awards come from those subgroups. Divisions and round tables are similar, in that they are both smaller groups within the American Library Association with specific interests and purposes, but round tables are smaller and less formal. The Newbery Award and Pura Belpre Award are sponsored by the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC) division, while the Pura Belpre Award is co-sponsored by REFORMA, the National Association to Promote Library and Information Services to Latinos and the Spanish-Speaking, an ALA affiliate. The Coretta Scott King Awards are part of the Ethnic & Multicultural Information Exchange Round Table (EMIERT) and the Stonewall Awards are part of the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Round Table (GLBTRT). The Schneider award is just considered an American Library Association award.

Established in 1941 as the Division of Libraries for Children and Young People, the Association for Library Service to Children is a “network” of “more than 4,000 children's and youth librarians, children's literature experts, publishers, education and
library school faculty members, and other adults dedicated to engaging communities to build healthy, successful futures for all children” (Association for Library Service to Children, 2018a). It has “60 active committees” (Association for Library Service to Children, 2018a), including those that focus on “Child Advocacy” and those that focus on “Evaluation of Media” (Association for Library Service to Children, 2018b), and it has “exciting initiatives” including El día de los niños/El día de los libros (Children’s Day/Book Day), and Every Child Ready to Read @ your library®. It also encourages members to “[play] a part in advocating for better library services and the materials for ALL children” (Association for Library Service to Children, 2018a). It is presented as dedicated to children’s well-being through education and literacy endeavors.

REFORMA, the National Association to Promote Library and Information Services to Latinos and the Spanish-Speaking, was established in 1971 and it promotes “Spanish-language and Latino” interests. It does this through library collection development, “bilingual and bicultural” staff recruitment, “services and programs that meet the needs of the Latino community,” “a national information and support network,” “education of the U.S. Latino population” about library services and materials, and “lobbying efforts to preserve existing library resource centers.” “All interested persons” are invited, with membership presumed to be made up of “librarians, library trustees, community and library school students with mutual concerns” (REFORMA, 2018). It is presented as dedicated to making sure Latinx people get the materials and information they need.

Formerly “the Ethnic Materials Information Exchange Task Force (EMIE) of the Social Responsibilities Round Table (SRRT) was elevated to the status of Round Table”
in 1982 (American Library Association, 2018c). This task force followed an “Ad Hoc Committee on Treatment of Minorities in Library Materials” that existed from 1967-1972. Its mission is to be “a source of information on recommended ethnic collections, services, and programs,” to “organize task forces, institutes, and workshops,” to develop “forums and symposia programs” about “key issues of ethnicity and librarianship,” and to “maintain a liaison with the Office for Diversity, Literacy and Outreach Services” and to work with other groups, “including ethnic affiliates,” within the ALA “for the betterment of outreach services,” and to share its work. Its primary “initiatives and projects” are the Coretta Scott King Book Awards (which also include the John Steptoe Award for New Talent and the Coretta Scott King-Virginia Hamilton Award for Lifetime Achievement) and the EMIERT Multicultural Awards, which are for librarians and for scholarship, rather than books. There are no specific guidelines as to who does or does not belong, but it is restricted to American Library Association members. It is presented as being dedicated to raising awareness of ethnic identity and concerns.

The Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Round Table, which was established in 1970 as ALA’s Task Force on Gay Liberation, but not promoted to Round Table Status until 1999 (American Library Association, 2018e), is meant to both serve the “information needs” of the GLBT “professional community” and the GLBT “information and access needs of individuals at large.” It is explicitly committed to freedom of information and provides a “forum for discussion and an environment for education and learning” regarding GLBT needs. Its purpose is manifold and includes improving “quality, quantity, and accessibility of library materials and service,” working toward “eliminating job discrimination against” GLBT people in library fields,
“advocate[ing] revising classification schemes, subject heading lists, indices, etc., in order to remove” derogatory terms to GLBT people, advocacy for GLBT library staff and library patrons, “support[ing] other under-represented and disadvantaged groups” and working with GLBT groups outside of the ALA (American Library Association, 2018d). The Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Round Table calls itself the “ALA home for the GLBT community, their friends and allies” and claims members from “all the divisions and round tables of ALA” (American Library Association, 2018f). It is presented as both dedicated to information about and for GLBT people and to the political concerns of the GLBT library community.

The Newbery Award Committee is open to any members of the Association for Library Services to Children, as long as they can make the time commitment, have “ready access to the major part of the children’s books published during the year under consideration” and have no conflicts of interest. They are “chosen for their experience and represent a broad range of geographical areas as well as sizes and types of libraries” (Association for Library Service to Children, 2015, p. 7). The Newbery Committee is made up of 15 members. Eight members are “elected annually from a slate of no fewer than sixteen,” and seven, including the chair, are appointed by the president of the Association for Library Service to Children (Association for Library Service to Children, 2015, p. 9).

The Pura Belpré Award committee is smaller. It only has six members and the chair. Three members are from the Association for Library Service to Children and three members are from REFORMA. “The chair of the committee alternates between ALSC and REFORMA… and is appointed by the President of the organization whose turn it is
to chair the committee” (Association for Library Service to Children and REFORMA: The National Association to Promote Library Services to Latinos and the Spanish-Speaking, 2015, p. 9).

The Coretta Scott King Awards Jury committee is a standing committee of the Coretta Scott King Committee (The Ethnic Multicultural Information Exchange Round Table, 2016, p. 2). Anyone in the Ethnic Multicultural Information Exchange Round Table is welcome to join the Coretta Scott King Committee, but the Coretta Scott King Awards Jury committee itself has a similar process to the other award committees. Like the Pura Belpré Award committee, it has seven members, a chair, three members appointed by the chair, and three members elected by members of the Coretta Scott King Committee (p. 6). The Chair is elected from a slate presented by a nominating committee (p. 10).

The Stonewall Mike Morgan and Larry Romans Children’s and Young Adult Literature Awards is a subcommittee of an 11 member Stonewall Book Awards Committee that also includes a subcommittee for the adult fiction and adult non-fiction awards. The round table chair appoints the committee chair who both serves as the chair for the overall Book Awards Committee and one of the two subcommittees. The round table chair appoints the chair of the other subcommittee as well. The chair and committee members must be members of the American Library Association and the Round Table. The chair must be able to attend the two major meetings, while all other committee members need to only attend the Midwinter Meeting, although it is strongly encouraged that they attend both (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Round Table, 2016b). It is unclear if the other members of the committee are elected or appointed.
The Schneider Awards Jury is made up of seven people, like the Coretta Scott King and Pura Belpré Medal committees. These committee members are meant to be “American Library Association members with experience in book selection and knowledge of disability experiences.” The are “appointed by the staff liaison and the Chair of ALA Awards, from the Office of Governance of ALA, who also appoints the Jury Chair,” and they must include a member each from the Association for Library Service the Children, the Young Adult Library Service Association, and the Association of Specialized and Cooperative Library Agencies, ALSC, the Association for Library Service to Children YALSA, the Young Adult Library Service Association ASCLA, the Association of Specialized and Cooperative Library Agencies, as well as the children’s or young adult librarian from the Library of Congress’s National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, or an appointed librarian from the National Library Service (Schneider Family Book Award manual, 2014).

These committee members do the work of interpreting the criteria and using it to select books that fit the criteria, the American Library Association’s goals, as well as the goals of their smaller piece of the American Library Association. They are in those divisions, round tables, and affiliates due to their interests, so they are in many ways already aligned with the goals of their division, round table, or affiliate and its award. Each of these divisions, round tables, and affiliates range in how much they are dedicated to service to children, the pedagogical nature of libraries, and the political needs of those they represent, as well as what they understand those political needs to be. That influences the criteria and the books that get chosen.
Difference in the Criteria

The Coretta Scott King, Pura Belpré, Schneider, and Stonewall awards were each created to address a gap in whose books were earning prestigious awards such as the Newbery, deliberately attempting to establish more positive meanings for groups who have been considered different. The criteria and manuals for these awards give us a great deal of information about what the awards may be intended to do. While the founders of each of the awards and the members of the committees for each of the awards have their own individual goals for the awards, these intentions are all filtered through the recorded, official award criteria and manuals. Like the books that have recently won these awards, which will be addressed in Chapter Four and Five, the awards criteria and manuals acknowledge the challenges of difference, the ways that difference brings strength and joy, and a desire to be considered normal, but they do little to delineate how to consider the representation of other groups who are considered different.

Those who are considered different are, as McLaren states, “always [different] in relation” (1995, p. 105), and their bid for normalcy or acceptance is judged by those who are considered normal. These awards are an attempt to claim the power of full participation rights, but the awards also reify their difference (Fraser, 1995). As a step toward equal status, the awards both celebrate the uniqueness of the groups that they are about and for, and claim their equal worth through the quality of literature that they promote and honor. As groups who were previously ignored or misrepresented attempt to rectify their treatment through these awards, Hall cautions us about the challenges of reinventing meaning (1997a, 1997b). The accumulated meaning of negative
representations that have reduced and essentialized our understanding of a group are not easily shaken (Hall, 1997a, p. 257).

The Challenges of Difference

The manuals and criteria for the Coretta Scott King, Pura Belpré, Schneider, and Stonewall awards describe the awards as an overdue honor and allude to the historic challenges that led to the need for and creation of the award.

Award as overdue recognition

The awards are not just a response to a lack of stories by and about groups who have experienced difference because of an abstract need for fairness, but because those stories are unique. Each of the identity-focused awards criteria refer to the “experience” that the award winning books provide “the artistic expression of” (American Library Association, 2016e; Association for Library Service to Children, 2016b; Association for Library Service to Children and REFORMA: The National Association to Promote Library Services to Latinos and the Spanish-Speaking, 2015, pp. 8, 9, 10 11, 54, 56, 69, 70, 81, 82; The Ethnic Multicultural Information Exchange Round Table, 2016, p. 1; Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Round Table, 2016b; Schneider Family Book Award manual, 2014) For example, Coretta Scott King awards intend to encourage “the artistic expression of the African American experience” (American Library Association, 2016e).
One function of the Coretta Scott King, Pura Belpré, Schneider, and Stonewall awards is to honor authors and books who have otherwise been ignored. The purpose of the Coretta Scott King awards is to “promote, recognize and celebrate the continued publication of quality literature by African American children’s authors and illustrators” (The Ethnic Multicultural Information Exchange Round Table, 2016, p. 1), particularly for “outstanding inspirational and educational contributions” (American Library Association, 2016e). Part of the responsibilities of the Coretta Scott King Committee is to “encourage publishers to publish works of new African American authors and illustrators, and continue their support of current African American children's authors and illustrators” (The Ethnic Multicultural Information Exchange Round Table, 2016, p. 2).

Similarly, the Pura Belpré winners are meant to be “outstanding original works written or illustrated by a Latino/Latina author or illustrator that portray, affirm, and celebrate the Latino/Latina cultural experience” (Association for Library Service to Children and REFORMA: The National Association to Promote Library Services to Latinos and the Spanish-Speaking, 2015, p. 9). This is in service of the founders’ goals to “encourage Latino authors and illustrators in their efforts to produce children’s works celebrating the Latino experience” (Association for Library Service to Children and REFORMA: The National Association to Promote Library Services to Latinos and the Spanish-Speaking, 2015, p. 8). Their definition of “Latino” is the broad, yet bounded, “people whose heritage emanates from any of the Spanish-speaking cultures of the Western Hemisphere” (Association for Library Service to Children and REFORMA: The National Association to Promote Library Services to Latinos and the Spanish-Speaking, 2015, p. 10).
The Schneider and Stonewall awards have no criteria for the identity of the creators of the text. While the Schneider awards do not necessarily have to be by authors or illustrators with diagnosed disabilities, the books are meant to fill a gap in representation that the donor, Katherine Schneider, noticed from childhood on, with only “Helen Keller, Louis Braille, and the seven blind men who went to see the elephant” as representations of blind people, with other disabilities “far[ing] no better” (Schneider Family Book Award manual, 2014). The Stonewall award’s official description includes that it is the “first and most enduring award for GLBT books,” existing since 1971 (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Round Table, 2016a), although, as a general description of the award, it doesn’t state that children’s books did not receive the award until 2010.

The Newbery awards and Pura Belpré awards are both presented by the Association for Library Service to Children, and much of the language and content of their lengthy manuals is similar, and often identical. The most recent editions of both manuals include a statement titled “Diversity and ALSC Media Award Evaluation.” This statement reminds committee members that their “responsibility” is to “reflect” the ALSC’s “core value” of “inclusiveness,” because “everyone benefits, children most of all,” when titles that “authentically reflect the diversity found in our nation and the wider world” win these awards (Association for Library Service to Children, 2015, p. 23; Association for Library Service to Children and REFORMA: The National Association to Promote Library Services to Latinos and the Spanish-Speaking, 2015, p. 24). While the criteria represent the struggles to be included and heard, they also serve as a reminder that the works that have been ignored are genuinely valuable.
Difference as Strength

The criteria of the awards imply ways that the experience of difference can engender strength. This possibility for strength is seen in the validation of literary excellence in literature, the expectations for the characters, and in the push for continued and further growth of the readers of the award winners.

Validation of literary excellence

Books about and by African Americans, Latinx people, disabled people, and those who are GLBT have rarely won the Newbery award. Nonetheless, of course, each of these groups have produced and been characters in excellent literature for children. The Coretta Scott King awards are awarded to “biographical, social, historical, and social history treatments” that “promote an understanding and appreciation of the black experience” (The Ethnic Multicultural Information Exchange Round Table, 2016, p. 2). Each of these genres includes an element of realism, so the award seems to be intended to give readers insight into the reality of black experience. “The main purpose” of the committee for the Coretta Scott King Award is to honor “outstanding contributions to literature for children and young adults” written by African American authors and illustrators (The Ethnic Multicultural Information Exchange Round Table, 2016, p. 1). Other guidance states that the award is for “quality literature” (p. 1), and “outstanding inspirational and educational contributions” (American Library Association, 2016e), while the criteria themselves list the “established standards of quality writing for youth” (American Library Association, 2016e) that the award winners are expected to meet.
More than realism, per se, the focus of the Pura Belpré award seems to be more on “cultural authenticity” (Association for Library Service to Children, 2016b; Association for Library Service to Children and REFORMA: The National Association to Promote Library Services to Latinos and the Spanish-Speaking, 2015, p. 11). This concern for cultural authenticity extends to the appointment of a “Cultural Competence Consultant” who provides “an overview of Latino culture” and consultation on any “issue or question” that come up “related to the cultural authenticity or the representation of Latino culture” (Association for Library Service to Children and REFORMA: The National Association to Promote Library Services to Latinos and the Spanish-Speaking, 2015, p. 12). Also, in service of this goal of cultural authenticity, “committee members should possess a self-declared fluent reading knowledge of Spanish,” although “committee members who are not proficient in speaking Spanish” may work with “a fluent Spanish reader in evaluating the works in Spanish” (p. 13). The ability to read Spanish is an asset in this context and may cause a person “to be recruited… to volunteer for the committee” (p. 13). Like the Coretta Scott King, the Pura Belpré award is also for “outstanding original works” according to the manual (Association for Library Service to Children and REFORMA: The National Association to Promote Library Services to Latinos and the Spanish-Speaking, 2015, p. 9), which repeats the term “outstanding” to describe its award winners (pp. 8, 9, 10, 11, 54, 56, 69, 79, 82), and provides two detailed lists of what “outstanding” means (p. 10). One list includes the same descriptors used by the Newbery manual to define “distinguished” literature (Association for Library Service to Children, 2015, p. 10).
The Schneider award says that its winners can be “fiction, biography, or other form of nonfiction,” but much of the manual includes specifications for the kind of portrayal that can be included. It requires “accurate” information about the disability or disabilities in the book, and those disabilities should be portrayed as “part of a full life, not as something to be pitied,” and not “the focus of the life.” The characters with disabilities “should be realistic, avoiding exaggeration or stereotypes” and they should be “integral to the presentation,” rather than a “passive bystander” The manual also specifies that “books with death as the main theme are generally disqualified.” Schneider awards “recognize and honor books for their distinguished portrayal of people living with a disabling condition” (Schneider Family Book Award manual, 2014).

In terms of the Stonewall award, while adult books have a fiction and a nonfiction award, there is no specification for whether children’s books are fiction or nonfiction. The criteria do not specify that their books need to be any particular format or style, but that they must relate “to the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender experience” and have “gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender themes” (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Round Table, 2016b). The Stonewall Book Awards criteria states that as “the first and most enduring award for GLBT books” (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Round Table, 2016a), “many… books have been honored for exceptional merit” (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Round Table, 2016a). What makes the books best or exceptional is not explained and the specifications for what constitutes quality children’s literature is absent from the description of the awards.

The description of each award claims literary excellence for its winners, and all but the Stonewall lay out very clear descriptions of what literary excellence entails.
These books are not meant to just be good books by and about the groups for whom the awards are intended, but the awards proclaim that their awards go to excellent works of literature, based on universal, high standards.

**Positive portrayals**

Because of the stereotypes and low opinions that sometimes accompany being considered different, these awards are also meant to remind readers of the strength and other positive attributes of the groups that they represent. The Stonewall and Newbery awards do not have any criteria or guidance regarding how GLBT or child characters should be portrayed, but the Coretta Scott King, Schneider, and Pura Belpré awards are only for positive portrayals.

The characters in the Coretta Scott King award winners need to “portray growth and development” (American Library Association, 2016e), and the Schneider awards specify that the winners portray characters’ disabilities accurately and as “part of a full life, not as something to be pitied.” The manual advises that characters with disabilities “be integral,” either as “protagonist or secondary character,” rather than passively standing by in the book, and that “books with death as the main theme are generally disqualified” (Schneider Family Book Award manual, 2014). The books eligible for the Pura Belpré award must include an “accurate and positive portrayal of the Latino culture” (Association for Library Service to Children and REFORMA: The National Association to Promote Library Services to Latinos and the Spanish-Speaking, 2015, p. 10). Also, according to the sample letter for the committee members’ employers, the committee
member will help “encourage” authors “to produce children’s works celebrating the Latino experience in the United States” (Association for Library Service to Children and REFORMA: The National Association to Promote Library Services to Latinos and the Spanish-Speaking, 2015, p. 54), which is also listed as the founders’ desire that inspired the award (p. 8). This celebratory nature of the books implies the expectation of positive representation.

Growing readers

While the Stonewall award makes no claims to the growth that readers of their award-winners may experience, one stated purpose of the other awards is to support the growth and development of the young readers of the award-winning books, including those who belong to the group who has been considered different.

Coretta Scott King award committee members are charged with paying “particular attention” to titles that “motivate readers to develop their own attitudes and behaviors as well as comprehend their personal duty and responsibility as citizens in a pluralistic society” (American Library Association, 2016e). The Diversity statement from ALSC that is found in both the Pura Belpré manual and the Newbery manual states that children benefit from awards that “authentically reflect the diversity found in our nation and the wider world” (Association for Library Service to Children, 2015, p. 23; Association for Library Service to Children and REFORMA: The National Association to Promote Library Services to Latinos and the Spanish-Speaking, 2015, p. 24). In her speech that introduces the Schneider award manual, the donor, Katherine Schneider, expresses
gratitude to the books and the people who helped her navigate the lack of accessible books, which she says led to her Ph. D. and “very satisfying thirty-year career” (Schneider Family Book Award manual, 2014). Children’s literature is traditionally considered to be didactic, and with the exception of the Stonewall award, each of these award manuals states the direction of growth and learning that the books should foster.

Within group difference

The groups about whom the awards are intended are not monolithic. Although each of the identity-focused awards refers to the “experience” of that identity, there is no single way to be or experience any of those identities. The criteria and manuals for the awards refer to the different ages and experiences of these groups.

Despite the language of “the ____ experience” found in the manuals and criteria for each of the identity-based awards, each of the groups who are honored with the award are made of people who have had very different experiences, and all but the Coretta Scott King award have language in their criteria and manuals that acknowledges this variety of experience. Just as Latinx people are not just Spanish speakers, English speakers, or bilingual between both languages, Pura Belpré winners are eligible for books that are “published in Spanish, English, or bilingual formats” (Association for Library Service to Children and REFORMA: The National Association to Promote Library Services to Latinos and the Spanish-Speaking, 2015, p. 9). The Pura Belpré award medal is described as a picture of “Pura Belpré with two children, capturing her true likeness and spirit” rather than a generic or stereotyped Latina (Association for Library Service to
Children and REFORMA: The National Association to Promote Library Services to Latinos and the Spanish-Speaking, 2015, p. 8). This acknowledgement of within group difference and unique identity is also seen in the award’s definition of “original work,” which includes “books that are traditional in origin” as long as “the retelling and interpretation are the writer’s own” (p. 10). This language is also seen in the Newbery award committee manual (Association for Library Service to Children, 2015, p. 68). Both awards also suggest that committee members be aware of “how their own perspectives and experiences shape their responses to materials,” because each member “brings unique strengths,” “gaps in knowledge and understanding, and biases” (Association for Library Service to Children, 2015, p. 23; Association for Library Service to Children and REFORMA: The National Association to Promote Library Services to Latinos and the Spanish-Speaking, 2015, p. 24).

In her speech that prefaces the Schneider manual, Katherine Schneider mentions her own blindness as well as others’ “diseases, conditions,” and deafness, “alcoholism, attention deficit disorder, diabetes, and fibromyalgia” as unique disabilities. The manual also explains how she “intentionally allowed for a broad interpretation” of disability so that “each committee [could] decide on the qualifications of particular titles” (Schneider Family Book Award manual, 2014).

Books eligible for the Stonewall awards “relat[e] to the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender experience.” While this language en folds each of those into a single “experience,” it also names each orientation or identity as unique from the other. The award also specifies that “English translations of foreign-language books” are eligible,
which includes gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people from all over the world within the award umbrella.

The Pura Belpré and Newbery awards both acknowledge that their committee members have a large variety of experiences, and unique “critical viewpoint[s]” (Association for Library Service to Children, 2015, p. 22; Association for Library Service to Children and REFORMA: The National Association to Promote Library Services to Latinos and the Spanish-Speaking, 2015, p. 22). Also, within the recently added diversity statement, “committee members are strongly encouraged to be open to listening and learning as well as sharing as they consider materials representing diverse experiences both familiar and unfamiliar to them” (Association for Library Service to Children, 2015, p. 23; Association for Library Service to Children and REFORMA: The National Association to Promote Library Services to Latinos and the Spanish-Speaking, 2015, p. 24). Stonewall committee members are described as “diverse in gender identify [sic], race, age, geography and by type of library,” providing a variety of experiences (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Round Table, 2016b). While the books that are eligible for the awards is strictly bounded, most of the awards claim to be beneficial to and influenced by the broader, more diverse general population. The Chair of the committee is referred to as a “him” or a “her,” expressing some binary gender diversity, but not the complete gender diversity within the GLBT population (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Round Table, 2016b). These allusions to diversity of experience within groups allow for books that are not homogenous to be honored with the awards, although the language does not always reflect all of the diversity. This constrained diversity may reflect the awards’ claims of their groups’ normalcy.
Normalcy

After a history of lack of representation, these awards are part of a claim to normalcy for the groups for whom they are meant. Some of the criteria and manuals make a direct point that the group who the award honors is part of normal society.

Part of normal society

Books given the Coretta Scott King award are meant to promote the readers’ comprehension of their “personal duty and responsibility as citizens in a pluralistic society” (American Library Association, 2016e). The Schneider award attempts to make sure that the characters with disabilities are represented in a “realistic” way as “integral” characters (whether they be “protagonists or a secondary character”), and that their disability is “part of a full life, not… something to be pitied” (Schneider Family Book Award manual, 2014). While those awards criteria highlight the ways that the groups they focus on are part of normal society, the Pura Belpré and Stonewall awards criteria do not explicitly do so.

Others’ Difference

At the same time that the groups that the awards are for desire representation and recognition, the awards are not explicitly designed to provide representation and recognition to all groups. The criteria and manuals delineate those who are ineligible,
explain how even those who do not identify with the eligible group may benefit, and leave room for broader diversity in the award committees.

**The ineligible**

The Coretta Scott King award (American Library Association, 2016e) and the Pura Belpré award (Association for Library Service to Children and REFORMA: The National Association to Promote Library Services to Latinos and the Spanish-Speaking, 2015, p. 9-10) are only for authors and illustrators who share an identity with the focus of the awards and who are residents or citizens of the United States. The Schneider award only says “the book must be published in English” (Schneider Family Book Award manual, 2014), but the Pura Belpré is for English, Spanish or bilingual books (Association for Library Service to Children and REFORMA: The National Association to Promote Library Services to Latinos and the Spanish-Speaking, 2015, p. 9), and the Stonewall (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Round Table, 2016b) and Newbery (Association for Library Service to Children, 2015, p. 68) make exceptions for their English-language policy for translations or words and phrases. The Coretta Scott King award which makes no specification for language.

**Everyone else**

All but the Stonewall awards claim benefits for populations other than those about and for whom the awards are intended. The Coretta Scott King award makes a specific
statement that their award is to honor literature that will “promote understanding and appreciation of the culture of all peoples and their contribution to the realization of the American dream of a pluralistic society” (American Library Association, 2016e). In fact the award is also meant to encourage books that “motivate readers to develop their own attitudes and behaviors as well as comprehend their personal duty and responsibility as citizens in a pluralistic society” (American Library Association, 2016e). This pluralism is not just claimed for the benefit of the African Americans about and by whom the books should be written, but for all Americans.

This pluralism is also referred to by the diversity statement found in the Pura Belpré and Newbery award manuals. The statement pledges the importance of “inclusiveness” to the Association for Library Services to Children because “everyone benefits” from titles that are recognized “authentically reflect[ing] the diversity found in our nation and the wider world” (Association for Library Service to Children, 2015, p. 23; Association for Library Service to Children and REFORMA: The National Association to Promote Library Services to Latinos and the Spanish-Speaking, 2015, p. 24), not just those for whom the award may be directly intended. The Schneider award manual describes its medal’s image of “boys and girls holding hands encircling a small world” as meant to “symbolize the ideal of equal treatment for all children everywhere” (Schneider Family Book Award manual, 2014). This image shows the children standing and does not include any children with visible physical disabilities.
Difference and Normalcy in the Newbery Criteria

The original stated purpose of the Newbery award is, in part, to “emphasize to the public that contributions to literature for children deserve similar recognition” (Association for Library Service to Children, 2015, pp. 7, 60) as literature for adults. The Newbery award’s criteria and manual also make claims to difference as it describes the historic underappreciation of children’s literature, although they primarily serve to remind readers to preserve and honor the award’s already existing prestige. Nonetheless, the audience for and producers of this excellence are not named, which has often left the door open for that excellence to be defined through white, English-speaking, nondisabled, and straight perspectives.

The Newbery award (Association for Library Service to Children, 2015, p. 10) is only for authors who are residents or citizens of the United States. Like the Schneider and Stonewall, the Newbery awards have no other criteria for the identity of the creators of the text. However, they allude to the way that children’s literature has not always been highly valued, with John Newbery having been the namesake of the award at least in part because he was “the first person to take children’s book publishing seriously” (Association for Library Service to Children, 2015, p. 2). The purpose of the award has, since its inception, included “emphasiz[ing] to the public that contributions to literature for children deserve similar recognition” and giving children’s librarians “an opportunity to encourage good writing in this field” (Association for Library Service to Children, 2015, pp. 7, 60). The books must distinctly be for children, with “children’s books derived from previously published adult books” ineligible (Association for Library
Service to Children, 2015, p. 67). Each of the award manuals implies that they are honoring and serving a previously insufficiently recognized group.

The Newbery award manual uses identical language to the Pura Belpré award manual to describe who the books should be intended for (Association for Library Service to Children, 2015, p. 10). Although the Newbery and Pura Belpré manuals are very similar, a place where they differ is in their suggested employee letters. The Pura Belpré letter to employers mentions encouraging “Latino” authors, but while both contain very similar language, such as stating that “already well-practiced reviewing and evaluative skills will be further honed and heightened,” the Newbery letter tells employers that the committee member will be “instrumental in maintaining the prestigious and distinguished traditions of the Newbery Award” (Association for Library Service to Children, 2015, p. 54; Association for Library Service to Children and REFORMA: The National Association to Promote Library Services to Latinos and the Spanish-Speaking, 2015, p. 54).

Both awards also suggest that committee members be aware of “how their own perspectives and experiences shape their responses to materials,” because each member “brings unique strengths,” “gaps in knowledge and understanding, and biases” (Association for Library Service to Children, 2015, p. 23; Association for Library Service to Children and REFORMA: The National Association to Promote Library Services to Latinos and the Spanish-Speaking, 2015, p. 24).

While the Newbery award manual also has the “Diversity and ALSC Media Award Evaluation” statement that the Pura Belpré manual contains, it has no specific responsibility to outstanding or distinguished literature about or by any particular group.
The literature it honors must only be children’s books. The committee looks for the “most distinguished” children’s book of the year (Association for Library Service to Children, 2015, pp. 7, 9, 10, 53, 54, 55, 56). The manual describes part of the initial goal of the award as “to emphasize to the public that contributions to literature for children deserve similar recognition” (p. 6) as literature for adults. While the Newbery award is only eligible for books published in English, “this requirement DOES NOT limit the use of words or phrases in another language where appropriate in context” (Association for Library Service to Children, 2015, p. 68), which may acknowledge the fact that children in the United States speak many different languages.

Analysis

The Newbery is a strong part of the selective tradition in children’s literature that has naturalized the power of those considered normal (Williams, 1977; Taxel, 1981; Hall, 1997a, p. 259). This selective tradition has traditionally left out the voices of and authentic non-stereotyped representations of African Americans, Latinx people, people with disabilities, and GLBT people. Specifically honoring and promoting authentic representations holds a promise of participatory parity for those who have been left out, and these representations can be powerful counterstories to previous representations. However, awards that are specific to identity run the risk of reifying the very culture that sets those groups apart because of alleged inferiority in the first place. These awards are a response to an urgent call for increased positive representation, but they are still
presented within a culture that believes and values many negative representations of these groups as well.

As a response to the selective tradition with its stereotyped representations, the awards each are poised to honor counterstories that “[call] into question normative depictions of everyday living that ignore or discount structural barriers to equality faced by people of color” (Brooks, 2009, p. 38). These counterstories validate the experiences of those who find mirrors in the books and that challenge the perceptions of those who find windows within them. However, their existence as separate from the Newbery lets the Newbery off the hook, so there is representation without the need for the primarily white Newbery to share its high-status accolades with people of color. In this way, the Coretta Scott King Award benefits white people through interest convergence, and each of the awards benefit their normalized counterparts similarly. They also run the risk of crystallizing the identity categories that they celebrate, rather than calling those categories into question.

After having been previously ignored for so long, these groups must be named and specifically considered, to honestly consider and rectify the lack of recognition and resources they've experienced. However, even as the awards represent inclusion, their very nature celebrates the binaries between those who are considered normal and those who are considered different.

None of the committees need to be made up of the groups about and for whom their awards are intended (and, of course, children are presumable ineligible). While there are many factors to ensure that the committee members are both well-intentioned
and well-informed, they may not be enough to create committees who do not hold romanticized or patronizing visions of the groups about and for whom the awards are intended. The participation of those who are most impacted by the awards is important.

Most of the identity-focused awards (all but the Stonewall) demand authenticity and accuracy as part of their criteria, and the Association for Library Service to Children's recent diversity statement (which was used for the more recent Newbery Award winners) celebrates authentic reflections of diversity. This demand for authenticity precludes stereotyped representations and presumes that the committees have the ability to judge what is authentic (with the help of a cultural consultant, in the case of the Pura Belpré Award). This demand for authenticity and accuracy in outstanding texts pushes back on the idea that a text could be outstanding without being authentic or accurate. It holds these values as important parts of what quality entails.

A definition of excellence that is qualified through its ability to accurately, authentically, and positively represent a group could become overly didactic and medicinal. All the criteria, however, emphasize that the books that win should be truly excellent. Quicke’s “quasi-fiction,” a thin story whose “main aim is to convey factual information about the disability or difficulty” (1985, p. 135) is not enough. As the awards emphasize the normalcy of their characters’ stories, they are specifying that the winners of the award cannot doom their characters to an existence as only a lesson to be learned.

The awards push back against the selective tradition in important ways. Instead of considering the groups that they represent as inherently deficient or through
stereotyped lenses, they assume and celebrate their strengths, both in literary merit and in the quality of those who are represented. Nonetheless, in claiming equal literary merit to the Newbery award and other celebrated children's literature, and using similar criteria for judging that literary merit, they exhibit a tension found within the crisis, which is that the ways that they push back are still forged within the same cultural value systems that they are pushing back against. Claiming equal moral worth based on ability to rise to the same standards that normalized groups have set, idealizes those standards, and in turn the groups who set them. Similarly, the positive representations may create their own stereotypes with newly negative connotations.

A disability studies perspective also challenges this focus on previously set standards of quality and on positive portrayals. While people from all marginalized groups can embody the standards that are considered high, categories such as disability and difference are created by the overvaluing of certain qualities and attributes. A group does not gain its real moral worth through living up to quality standards. The quality standards and definitions of what a positive portrayal might be may also leave out those whose behavior may, in any number of ways, be queer. Assuming that standards of quality or what a positive portrayal might be are objective hides the ways in which these standards are constructed to uphold those who are considered normal.

The existence of each of these awards is powerful in that they sanction representations that have not consistently been considered appropriate for children. African American, Latinx, disabled, and GLBT identities are explicitly celebrated rather than shunned are avoided. While children's literature is generally presumed to be
pedagogical, the positioning of the books as didactic tools for understanding specific
groups does, however, turn those groups into static subjects that are valuable for their
educational function. In the selective tradition of the Newbery, white, European
American, nondisabled, straight characters are intrinsically valuable, rather than
potentially taboo, but fascinatingly exotic Others.

As the Coretta Scott King, Pura Belpré, Schneider, and Stonewall awards honor
previously ignored groups of people and expanses of literature, each award defines who
is part of their fold. Coretta Scott King and Pura Belpré criteria both state that the only
writers and illustrators who can win their awards are those who belong to their groups.
Schneider and Stonewall do not make such claims, and while Schneider allows for a
flexible definition of disability, Stonewall makes no allusions to the regularly growing
list of identities who are claiming space with GLBT people. Being able to tell one’s own
story is very powerful, and participation is a key tenet of disability studies. Although
research and respect go a long way in creating literature that does not feel wrong or
insulting to the groups that it is about, it is difficult to do it right.

In their advocacy for quality literature filled with positive, authentic, and accurate
portrayals, the awards criteria only allude to a small sampling of the ways that characters
within the honored groups can be different. Pura Belpré winners can be in English, in
Spanish, or in both languages, and the Newbery allows for a smattering of words in other
languages, if the story necessitates it. On the one hand, the focus on English makes some
sense in books honored in the United States for children, because it is the language of
most children within the United States, and English has the potential to be read by the
most number of children. At the same time, language difference is very political, with the English language being held up as the ideal, and it is held up as the expectation for most of the awards. The insistence on English by the awards limits whose stories can receive the awards, as well.

The Gay Lesbian Bisexual Transgender Round Table of the American Library Association has aims for political advocacy for GLBT people who work with and interact with libraries, but the Stonewall award does not use completely gender inclusive language in its descriptions of its committee members, or a complete list of the identities that are claiming space with GLBT people. This simple matter implies traditional binary views of gender and borders around identity within an organization that could be at the forefront of acknowledging and celebrating a more complete variety of genders and experiences.

Nonetheless, the awards are not explicitly closed to any of the variety of ways of embodying the identities about and for whom the awards are intended. Outside of explicitly delineating the primacy of English in most cases, within group difference is not presented as a hierarchy or matter of importance. All who speak English who would claim the terms of the award identities are welcome to them, and those who do not claim those identities are presumed to benefit educationally and morally from the awards.

The criteria of the identity focused awards claim that the books that they honor are of equal quality to the Newbery award, but that they have the added expectation of accurate representation of a marginalized group. The awards celebrate the distinctive nature of the groups about and for whom they are created, but they also make strong,
explicit claims that the books are of equal worth to books honored by other, more general prizes, such as the Newbery. Through their existence, the awards claim that the groups about and for whom the awards are intended have equal moral worth and should have equal status to those who are generally considered normal. While this claim of equal moral worth is a valid claim, if it is contingent on being considered normal, those within the books who cannot adequately claim normalcy still have the potential to be considered inferior. As groups have pushed for representation, the definitions of normal have expanded and shifted incrementally (Crenshaw, 1989; Fraser, 1995). Normalcy is as inconsistent and shifting as difference and it can be easily lost, depending on the context.

The Newbery award, in its initial claim of equal worth in the hopes of equal status to literature for adults, shows the danger of this valuing of normalcy. In its claims of validity and excellence, it gained some status, but did so within standards that have not adequately honored those considered different, such as African American, Latinx, disabled, and GLBT people and characters. And while the Newbery award is celebrated for honoring children's literature of high quality, the literature it honors is always seen as separate from traditional high-quality literature. The Newbery has not succeeded in elevating children's literature to the same cultural status as adult literature.

The Newbery's explicit call for inclusion does not name any of the groups it has excluded, but it goes a belated further step towards disrupting hierarchies and displacing binaries than the separate awards that have seemed to let it off the hook go (although this same call for inclusion is part of the Pura Belpré Award criteria as well). It has taken too long to explicitly consider those who are considered different and who it has
conspicuously ignored, but it now asks its committee members to consider the biases they bring to their decision-making.

Perhaps, however, prizing is necessarily not the way to disrupt these hierarchies (Steinberg et al, 2006), as it always leaves someone behind. But if we do prize, can it be done in a critically multicultural way? Chapter 4 considers the ways in which recent award winners represent difference. Like in the criteria, often the representation of difference is done in a way that acknowledges the challenges of being considered different, while celebrating the strength and uniqueness of those who are considered different, and the ways that they claim normalcy. To what degree, though, is this normalcy ultimately what we prize?
Chapter 4

Difference in American Library Association Award Winning Books

In Chapter 3, I examined the awards criteria for the Coretta Scott King, Pura Belpré, Schneider, Stonewall and Newbery award for how they address the concept of difference. While overall the identity-focused awards encourage authenticity and positive representations and they all demand excellence, each award has unique criteria for whom is eligible to win the awards, with the goal of readers coming away with positive and accurate understandings of groups who have been considered different. With those criteria in mind: How do recent winners (between 2012 and 2016) of the Coretta Scott King, Pura Belpré, Schneider, Stonewall, and Newbery represent the experience of difference?

Examining these texts across identity category and award offers a more complete analysis than one theory alone (May & Sleeter, 2010, p. 10), although deeply considering each identity category and theory is essential for that more complete understanding. In order to understand the representations of difference across awards, I examined every reference to difference and normalcy to see in what ways the strengths, challenges, within group differences, and claims to normalcy were presented. Because the text was so rich with individual references to difference and normalcy, my analysis focuses on these references, rather than considering each book as a whole. As I began the project, I had initially begun coding based on connections to the tenets of each of the critical theories, but as I tried to analyze the books based on that coding system, it became large and
unwieldy, with too many categories that had too much overlap, so I started the coding again, using the elements of difference and normalcy for my coding structure. Like with the criteria, I analyze the Newbery on its own, before drawing conclusions about how it compares to the other awards.

In this chapter I examine five recent winners of each award. These books are representative of how difference is constructed within the awards and perhaps understood by the committee members. I examine 24 books in total, because *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* won both the Pura Belpré and Stonewall awards for 2013. Most of the books I examine are middle-grade novels, but two of the Coretta Scott King winners are illustrated nonfiction historical surveys, and one Coretta Scott King winner and one Pura Belpré winner are memoirs. One Stonewall winner and one Newbery winner are picture books, and one of the Schneider winners plays with the forms of both novel and picture book. Both memoirs, one Pura Belpré winning novel, and one Newbery winner are in verse. Of the novels, most are realistic fiction, with both Coretta Scott winning novels, one of the novels that only won the Pura Belpré, one Schneider winner, and the novel that won both the Pura Belpré and Stonewall being set in the past (although none of the novels reaches back past the 1960s). One of the Schneider winners is fantasy.

Recent winners of the Coretta Scott King, Pura Belpré, Schneider, and Stonewall award present the concept of difference as challenging but also a source of strength. At the same time, they work to claim normalcy for their group. The Newbery provides a counterpoint, because its focus is on what the award committee solely considers excellent
children’s literature, rather than on an excellent or authentic depiction of any specific experience.

Coretta Scott King Winners

The five Coretta Scott King winners are all set in the past, and thus fall under either historical fiction, nonfiction, or memoir. The winner for 2012, artist and multiple award-winning children’s book author and illustrator (Nelson, 2018) Kadir Nelson’s *Heart and Soul* (2011) tells the story of African American history in the United States, from the founding of the country through the election of Barack Obama, through the eyes of a female narrator who traces it through her family’s history. The following year’s winner, *Hand in Hand* by Andrea Pinkney (2012), who began her work publishing and writing children’s books after noticing the lack of “books by African American authors that covered a wide range of subjects” (Tate, 2009, February 19) provides profiles of ten African American men who she considers role models, in chronological order from Benjamin Banneker to Barack Obama. In 2014, the award went to the novel, *P.S. Be Eleven*, Rita Williams-Garcia’s sequel (2013) to her *One Crazy Summer* (2010), in which Delphine Gaither and her sisters return home to Brooklyn from Oakland, and spend a late-1960s school year growing up and learning. The 2015 Coretta Scott King award-winner is *Brown Girl Dreaming*, Jacqueline Woodson’s memoir in verse about growing up in New York City and South Carolina in the 1960s (Woodson, 2014). Jacqueline Woodson is currently the National Ambassador for Young People’s Literature and has previously been the Young People’s Poet Laureate, as well as receiving numerous awards
(Alter, 2018, January 4), and while she is out about her sexuality (Fresh Air, 2014, December 10) and writes about GLBT fictional characters, she does not write about it in her memoir. The 2016 award honored Rita Williams-Garcia’s third novel about the Gaither sisters, *Gone Crazy in Alabama* (2015), about their summer visiting family in Alabama. Each of the authors for the award winning books were already well-known and well-respected authors when they received these Coretta Scott King awards. Although two of the award winners (*Heart and Soul* and *Hand in Hand*) are both beautifully illustrated, my analysis of the representation difference focuses on the words of the text, because most of the books in this study only have print text, and no pictures.

**Challenges of Being Considered Different**

The Coretta Scott King award winners I studied considered the challenges of experiences of slavery and abuse, segregation, stereotypes, and mistrust.

**Slavery and Abuse**

Coretta Scott King winners highlight the deliberate and limiting abuse of African Americans. Within any of the award-winning books, the most obvious form in which others have had power over a group that is considered different is the African American experience of slavery, which is addressed in all five of the Coretta Scott King award winners (Nelson, 2011, p. 15, 23-24; Pinkney, 2012, pp. 18-19, 28, 34, 43, 45; Williams-Garcia, 2013, p. 2; Williams-Garcia, 2015, pp. 62, 89, 96; Woodson, 2014, p. 1). Slavery
was historically linked to skin color and race, and the abuse that followed fed off the constructed racial differences that led white people to accept slavery. Slavery was “normalized” and this normalization fed into the “silencing, exclusion, subordination, and exploitation” of black people even after they were formally free (Ng, 2003, p. 213), but none of the African American characters accept this state, a contrast to the content slaves Taxel found in his research on children’s books (1981). In *Heart and Soul*, Nelson’s narrator conveys Nelson’s own understanding of the “irony” that the United States was “created with the concept of freedom” while much of the population was enslaved (All Things Considered, 2011, September 26).

Even after the abolition of slavery, the African American historical figures in the historical surveys experience racially biased laws and the threat of physical danger because of their race (Nelson, 2011, pp. 43, 45, 56, 71, 85, 92, 96; Pinkney, 2012, pp. 36, 49, 114-115, 135, 151-153, 186). In both Woodson’s memoir and the novels about the Gaither girls, the legacy of slavery restricts the freedom of language and movement African American children and their families have (Woodson, 2014, pp. 31, 37; Williams-Garcia, 2013, p. 2; Williams-Garcia, 2015, pp. 10-12, 80-81, 123-128, 162-165, 212-214, 262). Even among all of the terror of this abuse, a young reader may resonate with Cecile’s command to her youngest daughter, “Enough people in the world trying to silence us. Girl, you better speak up” (Williams-Garcia, 2015, p. 238), discovering “that they are not alone in their marginality” (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 27).
Segregation

Because of the constant of racism (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 9; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 7; Lynn & Adams, 2002, p. 88; Brooks, 2008, p. 38; McNair, 2008, p. 7), segregation was a historical norm for many African American people, and Coretta Scott King award-winning books address this (Nelson, 2011, p. 45; Pinkney, 2012, pp. 66; 86; 109, 111, 179-180; Williams-Garcia, 2015, p. 143) as an unjust challenge that needed to be changed. Pinkney in particular illuminates the inferior conditions for African Americans that this segregation cultivated (Pinkney, 2012, pp. 121-122; 137-138), and the way it was appreciated and approved of by many white people (Pinkney, 2012, pp. 122, 143). However, none of the books describe the ways in which this segregation promoted white ignorance about African Americans which furthered beliefs of their inferiority (Howard, 1999, p. 64).

Each award-winning book is filled almost entirely with African American characters, although white characters represent a spectre of power that has the possibility to become violent, if African Americans were found in the wrong place (Hall, 1997, p. 236). But as the historical surveys advocate for and convey a historical shift away from such segregation, Woodson meditates on this racial segregation (2014, p. 1, 53-54), and how even as segregation fades and laws change, in the South, its legacy was eerily preserved, as “on the bathroom doors, /they didn’t use a lot of paint [over the WHITES ONLY sign] /so you can still see the words, right there /like a ghost standing in front /still keeping you out” (p. 92).
Stereotypes and Distrust Between African Americans and European Americans

White people in Coretta Scott King Award winning books do not trust African American’s honesty (Woodson, 2014, p. 82), sense of propriety (Williams-Garcia, 2015, p. 251), or civility (Pinkney, 2012, pp. 94, 99, 102, 122; Williams-Garcia, 2013, p. 14), fearing disruption and violence, because of pervasive racist stereotypes about black anger as violent and irrational compared to white responses (Hall, 1997, pp. 243, 245). In one case, they even think black people are cannibals (Pinkney, 2012, p. 208). The immediate unfairness is noted, but the structural element holding it up is not noted. These stereotypes set up a firm “Us and Them” dynamic, justifying white people’s feelings of superiority (Hall, 1997, p. 258), and a tragic consequence of the years of racism is that, according to Nelson, they “convinced many black and white folks that white people were better than black people in every way” (2011, p. 56-61), which is seen in Pinkney’s portrayal of the real Booker T. Washington (2012, p. 57) and in Williams-Garcia’s fictional Big Ma (2015, pp. 155-156).

Some African Americans distrust white people in these books. Sometimes the distrust is due to a very long history of cruel actions, as when, at school segregation’s end, black parents were cautious about sending their children to newly integrated schools (Pinkney, 2012, p. 124), but it is not always immediately warranted, such as Big Ma’s fears of lynching in Brooklyn (Williams-Garcia, 2013, p. 21-22), which is presented as humorous. However, police are sometimes abusive without consequence (Pinkney, 2012, p. 170), and there are Ku Klux Klan members in the police force (Williams-Garcia, 2015,
pp. 212, 215). The authors thoughtfully present their characters as being stronger than their challenges.

**Celebrating Strength and Uniqueness**

Coretta Scott King Award winners present their characters as strong and unique, because of their sources of strength, inspiration, and comfort, and the diversity of African Americans.

**Source of strength**

Critical race methodology understands “the racialized, gendered, and classed experiences” of people of color as “sources of strength” (Solorzano, & Yosso, 2002), but this strength is not easily attained. For example, Pinkney describes how from an early age, Jackie Robinson learned “he'd have to work hard for any advantages-- and for just plain fairness” (Pinkney, 2012, p. 134), and he had to learn to bury his feelings (p. 145). While this is rightfully portrayed as a heroic sacrifice, the longterm negative effects of such treatment and self-denial are never addressed, making such actions appear necessary, with no regard to cost. In fact, a theme of *Hand in Hand* (Pinkney, 2012) is the way that the men featured in it strove for racial equality (pp. 74-75, 98, 101, 112-113, 142-143, 191-192, 213). Woodson’s grandfather, frustratedly, says, “More than a hundred years.../ and we’re still fighting for the free life/ we’re supposed to be living” (Woodson, 2014, p. 73-75).
In *Gone Crazy in Alabama* (Williams-Garcia, 2015), the Gaither’s great grandmother tells the girls about her father, who “walked on land like a man who could walk on all the elements” (pp. 102-103). Pinkney describes the men she profiles as exceptionally smart (Pinkney, 2012, pp. 11, 14, 65, 69, 72, 86, 89, 111), honorable (pp. 36-37), soothing (pp. 56-57), hardworking (p. 87), determined (pp. 107, 136), and persuasive (pp. 67, 204). While each of these descriptions of exceptionality may be true, their inclusion may be a response to majoritarian stories that diminish the importance and abilities of African Americans (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Even though they are presented as almost superhuman, this may still not be enough to dislodge negative stereotypical ideas (Hall, 1997a, p. 274), and “becom[ing] the nation’s moral conscience” (Nelson, 2011, p. 92) is a big task.

**Inspiration and comfort**

Within the historical surveys, the belief that other ways of being treated were possible is shown to sustain the work for justice and civil rights, especially when other possibilities are seen first hand by W.E.B. DuBois (Pinkney, 2012, pp. 70, 72) and African American soldiers (Nelson, 2011, p. 77) in Europe. Racial pride is important for Pinkney’s historical figures (Pinkney, 2012, pp. 151, 157, 210-211), and family (Pinkney, 2012, pp. 192-193, p. 206; Woodson, 2014, pp. 8-9, 32), community (Pinkney, 2012, pp. 48-49, 90), and ancestors (Nelson, 2011, pp. 85, 99; Pinkney, 2012, pp. 67, 127, 146, 220) all bolster the African American characters in these books. Music (Nelson, 2011, p. 18; Woodson, 2014, pp. 262-263), religion (Pinkney, 2012, pp. 175, 180, 217; Williams-
Garcia, 2013, pp. 198-199), and civil rights activism (Williams-Garcia, 2013, p. 76; Woodson, 2014, pp. 5, 302-303, 308; Williams-Garcia, 2015, pp. 63, 238) also sustain them. None of these sources of inspiration and comfort lull the characters into a sense of complacency, but instead give them a sense of power to keep going. The fictional Gaither sisters excitedly shout, “Black infinity!” when “black folks were on TV for more than a minute” (Williams-Garcia, 2013, p. 68), but Delphine is also frustrated by Seventeen’s lack of information about how to manage her own hair (p. 160). Their exuberance reminds readers of the power of representation in their own life, and the sense of betrayal when representation is missing or inadequate.

Nelson’s own view of art is that it “calls the viewer to remember one’s highest self” (Nelson, 2018), and Pinkney’s son values Hand in Hand as a source of inspiration that is often lacking in available literature (Pinkney, Davis, & Pinkney, 2013, July 8). Literature (Nelson, 2011, p. 65; Pinkney, 2012, pp. 7,89; Williams-Garcia, 2013, pp. 51, 139-143, Woodson, 2014, pp. 3-4, 83, 227-228; Williams-Garcia, 2015, p. 15) is important in each book, and in an interview Woodson describes the way that literature not only brings “an escape from the world if that’s what you need” but “it also changes you,” pushing young people to “remain hopeful” (Alter, 2018, January 4). This speaks to Critical Race Theory’s counterstorytelling, in which “victims of racism can find their voice,” and others can “discover they are not alone in their marginality,” even becoming “empowered participants” learning how to describe their lives most powerfully (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 27). While this storytelling can be celebratory and powerful, it is often used to simply claim normalcy, in contrast to stories that stereotype and denigrate.
**Within group difference**

Another important element in Coretta Scott King winners is the way that African Americans are presented as unique individuals, all the way from their outward appearance through their opinions and experiences, often in a very loving and celebratory way. Pinkney marvels at “every beautiful shade of brown” (p. 102) in crowds and groups in her books, and describes the exact skin tones of many characters in her book with loving, food-influenced metaphors (pp. 65, 151, 208). Woodson also specifies skin tone, comparing her father’s “reddish-brown skin” to “the red dirt of the South” (2014, p. 41) and contemplating her brother’s paleness (p. 148), but skin tone is not the only variation of appearance for African American and black characters within these books (Pinkney, 2012, p. 151; Williams-Garcia, 2013, p. 48; Woodson, 2014, pp. 51, 181).

In Coretta Scott King award winners, African American characters are also portrayed as unique in their opinions about the necessity of racial justice and how to achieve it (Pinkney, 2012, pp. 50, 58, 76-77, 166, 170-171; Williams-Garcia, 2013, pp. 185-186, 206-207), and religious beliefs and traditions (Williams-Garcia, 2013, p. 170; Woodson, 2014, p. 300-301; Williams-Garcia, 2015, p. 240). Living in the Northern and Southern United States not only influenced the dialect and speed of the characters’ speech (Pinkney, 2012, p. 68-69; Woodson, 2014, p. 75), but also their experiences of explicit (Williams-Garcia, 2015, p. 10-12) and economic racism (Pinkney, 2012, p. 70). The differences are portrayed either neutrally or celebratorily, seemingly attempting to instill pride in a diverse array of African Americans. Acknowledging these differences is
important, reminding the reader of the humanity of those within groups that are regularly flattened and dehumanized (Tejeda, Espinoza, & Gutierrez, 2003, p. 14).

**Normalcy**

Nelson’s narrator claims normalcy and belonging for “black folks,” pushing back against cultural ignorance of their contributions to the building of the United States (Nelson, 2011, p. 9) and against the idea that they should be sent to Africa (p. 39). Claiming normalcy is complicated, shown through Woodson’s account of her mother’s attempt to dress her children as normally and respectably as possible, but moving to the back of their South Carolina bus in 1963, whispering, “We’re as good as anybody… As good as anybody” (2014, p. 30-31), a phrase that Woodson echoes at the end of the book (pp. 319-320). Similarly, her father does not like the South and its treatment of African Americans, telling his children that no one should make his family “look down at the ground,” because “All you Woodson kids deserve to be/ as good as you already are” (p. 29). While Crenshaw cautions against a framework that continues to keep people pushing others down to get out of a metaphorical basement (1989, pp. 151-152), as they claim normalcy, Woodson’s parents do not disparage anyone as they claim normalcy for their child. Sadly, though, African Americans are stuck measuring themselves and being measured against white people, because that comparison seems to have the most relevance and power (McLaren in Steinberg, et al. 2006, p. 150; Willis, 2008, p. 5).

While normalcy in these books is often a state of equality with white people, Pinkney quotes Barack Obama’s speech that not only claims equality with white people,
but that claims equality with Latino Americans and Asian Americans as well, stating that his “story is part of the larger American story,” erasing ethnic and racial differences into one United States of America (quoted in Pinkney, 2012, p. 225). This erasure is heralded as a positive, but it ignores how ethnic and racial differences can be sources of pride and are “ongoing social accomplishments in which we participate” (Ng, 2003) that cannot be simply shaken off. On the other hand, Woodson (2014) contemplates Mecca, which is important to her uncle, as a place where everything good, regardless of cultural specificity, can be found (p. 306), an expression of hope that does not put the burden of difference only on a “culture-laden and abnormal” Other (Shannon, 1994, p. 1-2) to either assimilate or demand their worth.

**Pura Belpré Winners**

Over the five years of award winners covered by this study, four novels and one memoir won the Pura Belpré award. One novel, *Under the Mesquite*, and the memoir, *Enchanted Air*, are both written as free verse poetry. *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe*, a novel, won the Stonewall award as well as the Pura Belpré. The 2012 winner, *Under the Mesquite* (Garcia McCall, 2011), is Guadalupe Garcia McCall’s poetic fictional account of a girl’s growing up as her family moves from Mexico to the United States and her mother fights cancer. Garcia McCall, who immigrated to the United States when she was six, is a teacher and a writer (Garcia McCall, 2018). In 2013, the award was given to multiple award winning author for teens and adults (Simon & Schuster, 2018), Benjamin Alire Sáenz’s *Aristotle and Dante*
Discover the Secrets of the Universe (Alire Sáenz, 2012), a novel from the point of view of the serious Ari as he describes his friendship with and love for the whimsical Dante, during the late 1980s. Meg Medina’s Yaqui Delgado Wants to Kick Your Ass (Medina, 2013) won for the following year. This novel tells the contemporary story of Piddy, a girl who starts at a new school and discovers that another girl wants to beat her up for reasons that she doesn’t understand, an experience that makes her question who she is. Meg Medina, a vocal advocate for We Need Diverse Books (Schulman, 2016, March 8), used her experiences of being bullied in seventh grade for her novel (Medina, 2014). In 2015, I Lived on Butterfly Hill, a novel by Marjorie Agosín (2014), a university professor and poet (Donovan & Lodge, 2014). It is about a girl who must go into exile in the United States in the 1970s after Chile’s government is taken over by a dictator. The next year, the award went to Enchanted Air: Two Cultures, Two Wings: A Memoir, Young People's Poet Laureate (Engle, 2018) Margarita Engle’s free verse memoir about being Cuban American in the 1960s (Engle, 2015).
Challenges of Being Considered Different

Latinx characters in Pura Belpré Award winners experience challenges related to disconnection from their home countries and families and assimilation into the culture(s) of the United States, and like African Americans in Coretta Scott King Award winners, they also experience challenges related to separation and stereotypes.

Disconnection and Assimilation

Latinx characters in Pura Belpré award-winning novels face the challenges of physical or emotional disconnection from their home countries and families (Garcia McCall, 2011, pp. 150, 164; Alire Sáenz, 2012, pp. 86-88; Medina, 2013, p. 125; Agosín, 2014, pp. 69, 87, 129, 238; Engle, 2015, pp. 22, 27, 57, 91, 124, 131, 184), as they move to the United States and attempt to find their place within its culture. The characters’ experiences of disconnection are all presented powerfully in order to elicit empathy and understanding, but the authors have different solutions for their characters.

On the one hand, in Under the Mesquite, Lupita’s mother talks about the love she feels for America and the hope she has for her children who “would someday be at home/on either side” of the United States/Mexico border (Garcia McCall, 2011, pp. 38-41), believing that she can improve her family’s life (Valdes, 1997, p. 1093) through citizenship. On the other, Engle’s Mami’s assimilation actually turns her from what Engle considers “an ordinary person” to a “strange, in-between-nations/exile, a lost
“wanderer” (p. 124). Together, they expose the dynamic tension of assimilation. It represents hope, but comes at a great cost.

In an interview, Medina describes the challenge of being a “bicultural” young person, as being “in the middle” and “always translating” (Komp, 2014, November 10). Americanness is a place of uncomfortable negotiation for Piddy’s family (Medina, 2013, p. 125), and even for Lupita and her idealistic mother (Garcia McCall, 2011, pp. 73-77). Lupita’s friends accuse her of becoming white, but she knows that “being Mexican” means more than how she talks, but instead means “togetherness, like a familia” (pp. 82-83).

Separation and Stereotypes

In *Yaqui Delgado Wants to Kick Your Ass*, Piddy thinks that her mother’s boss must think of her as a “nobody” (Medina, p. 82), but Piddy’s mother is worried about a different kind of “nobodies,” girls with “big hoop earrings and plucked eyebrows, their dark lips painted like those stars in the old black-and-white movies, their tight T-shirts that show too much curve and invite boys’ touches” (pp. 55-56). Medina’s book attempts to open up a place in people’s minds for a wide variety of Latinas, which she describes as much more diverse than she thinks most people, even Latinx people, understand it to be (Brown, 2013, May 7). In the novel, separation between kids who are and who are not Latinx is seen in and outside of school (Medina, 2013, pp. 14, 33). In other Pura Belpré winners, living in places where there are few people like them leads Latinx characters to be ignored (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 99), misunderstood (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 99; Agosín,
2014, p. 200), and treated “like a curiosity” (Engle, 2015, p. 127). The inclusion of these experiences of separation highlight how Latinx identities are often constructed as a response to American misunderstanding.

At school, when Cuba is not ignored (Engle 2015, pp. 129, 170-171), Engle faces disorienting stereotypes about her ancestral home (pp. 43-44). This points to the damaging effects school can have on Latinx youth (DeNicolo, 2016, p. 215). As a young character, Engle does not know how to challenge these stereotypes, but her book challenges them, presenting Cuba as beautiful and complex. Each book attempts to provide fuller, deeper pictures of Latinx characters, pushing against the way that “stereotyping reduces, essentializes, naturalizes, and fixes ‘difference’” (Hall, 1997, p. 258). While books cannot stand alone against years and layers of misconceptions, when these books are successfully authentic, they begin to dismantle the ignorance that many European Americans have about Latinx people, which has contributed to these stereotypes (Howard, 1999, p. 64). However, Celeste is the only character who directly challenges her American classmates’ stereotypical assumptions about her own home country (Agosín, 2014, pp. 188-189). While it is not only up to youth to disrupt the status quo, having models for how to do it is important.

Ari and Dante are fascinated by stereotypes about Latinx people (Alire Sáenz, 2012, pp. 45, 237, 279), but Dante’s mother is worried about the ways he might feed into stereotypes about Mexicans and poverty (p. 45) and Ari’s mother pushes back against his jokes that imply that using academic language “un-Mexicanize[s]” her (p. 237). Alire Sáenz deliberately wrote the characters of Ari and Dante to be “normal” rather than the stereotypical “anti-Mexican rhetoric that says we’re all illegals, all recent immigrants”
(Peterson, 2013, January 21), and the characters’ awareness of and discussion of stereotypes is one way in which he pushes back against that rhetoric. Pura Belpré winners attempt to empower young Latinx readers to understand their own strengths, and continue to build upon them, even as their challenges are also honored and acknowledged.

**Celebrating Strength and Uniqueness**

Like the Coretta Scott King award winners, winners of the Pura Belpré award highlight sources of strength and the diversity within the group.

**Sources of strength**

Like in winners of other awards about difference, family (Garcia McCall, 2011, p. 120-122, 172-174, 200-201; Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 102; Agosín, 2014, p. 410; Engle, 2015, pp. 31, 78) and friends (Agosín, 2014, p. 220-221; 247-248; Garcia McCall, 2011, p. 95) provide inspiration, while, uniquely, visits and connections to home in Mexico (Garcia McCall, 2011, pp. 84, 186), Chile (Agosín, 2014, pp. 30, 159, 290-291), and Cuba (Engle, 2015, p. 7, 9, 12, 102) provide a great deal of comfort and strength. In honoring these experiences and highlighting the ways that they are special, the books provide inspiration, comfort, and strength for readers who look to them as mirrors.

food” (Agosín, 2014, p. 244), and knowledge of nature (Engle, 2015, p. 128) encourage Latinx characters in these Pura Belpré winners and ease their sense of alienation. Like the art forms that are important to Latinx characters, Medina sees her writing as important to those who read it, because she is “an ambassador to people who don’t have a relationship to people from other places, but mostly I want to help kids feel proud of where they come from. To know that they are enough” (Russo, 2016, December 20).

Gloria’s business, Salón Corazón, provides an important space of connection for Piddy and others in her community. She has one rule for her employees (“and it’s not that you have to be legal, since she’ll pay you cash if you want”), which is “Mijas, in this business you have to be like an Alka-Seltzer!... A comforting relief” (Medina, 2013, pp. 59-60). At the close of the novel, Gloria and her salon provide the place where Piddy begins to reconnect with her mother and herself (pp. 259-260). For Medina, this ability to “[stay] connected with her culture and finds her clave—that unshakable sense of herself—so that she can dance over the world’s troubles no matter how heavily they are heaped on her” is what the novel is about, because “Being Latina is not something you have to get past. It’s something you embrace and use as fuel” (Medina, 2014), and the end of the novel expresses that joy.

**Within group difference**

Like African American characters in Coretta Scott King winners, in these Pura Belpré winners, from skin tone through different family traditions, Latinx characters are presented as unique, rather than as a homogenous group, even with some unpleasant
group members, reminding the reader of expanded possibilities within Latinx identities (Valdes, 1997, p. 1093; Tozer et al, 2011, p. 223). Because of the diversity of Latinx characters, Carmen Medina says that “Reading across the literature helps one understand the complex gender, social and racial identities of Latino/a immigrants in the United States” (2006, p. 73). In the awards’ focus on authentic literature, this diversity is valued and prized.

Lupita compares her appearance to her mother’s, deciding that her mother’s skin is “darker, richer brown… giv[ing] her a warm glow” (Garcia McCall, 2011, p. 61-62), while her father’s lighter skin tone makes him burn easier than the rest of the family (p. 85). While she does not ascribe any other value to the skin color difference, Ari and Dante feel like their differing skin tones align with different levels of Mexicanness (Alire Sáenz, 2012, pp. 20, 72), and Piddy’s Latinx classmates often treat her as white because of her pale skin, not believing she is not actually white (Medina, 2013, p. 6). Medina herself has spoken about the stereotypes about what a Latina is and how they are present even within the Latinx community, as people wonder “If you are bookish, or light-skinned, are you a Latina?” (Komp, 2014, November 10). Engle does not focus on skin tone, but thinks about the different colored eyes in her family (2015, p. 20).

Latinx families are presented as having differing levels of physical affection (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 26, 41) and economic privilege (Garcia McCall, 2011, pp. 187-189) in ways that surprise the protagonists of the books. Piddy also feels different from other Cubans in the United States in general, saying her family are the only ones who don’t have relatives back in Cuba (Medina, 2013, pp. 10-11). Meg Medina, author of *Yaqui Delgado Wants to Kick Your Ass*, has spoken about “when you say Latino, you’re
talking about a multitude of countries and customs,” aware that this makes writing about Latinx characters daunting, making her cautious and humble about getting it right (Schulman, 2016, March 8).

Not all of the Latinx characters are represented as pleasant or likeable. When Ari is teased for being “the most unpopular guy in the whole school,” he names Charlie Escobedo, another Latino classmate instead (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 158). Yaqui Delgado is presented as cruel and violent (Medina, 2013, pp. 4, 138, 160), possibly because of her envy their contrasting potential (p. 22) and upbringing (pp. 97, 219). The author, Meg Medina, believes that this “comes from a place of rage, wanting to hurt, wanting to put down” (Brown, 2013, May 7). Celeste’s classmate, Gloria, is snobby and cold (Agosín, 2014, pp. 56, 69, 101) because of her rich family’s connection to the government.

Differences in Chile, which had once added vibrant “colors” to the country, become problems during the General’s rule, and Celeste worries for “the murals,” “the colorful people,” and her parents (p. 87). As this state continues, the radio calls it “the restoration of order to the country” and Celeste wonders “what was out of order before” (2014, p. 91). The Pura Belpré award was designed to make room for books by and about Latinx people, and books that caution against this narrowing cruelty attempt to make space for all of their readers. Winners of the award also contemplate the ways that concepts of normalcy successfully and inadequately make this kind of space.
Normalcy

English is a way that characters in Pura Belpré award winners claim normalcy, but characters also consider removing the concept of borders, which delineate who belongs and who doesn’t, altogether.

English

English is the language of power in the United States, and not being able to use it, or even having an accent while using it, marks a speaker as different. Within Pura Belpré winners, learning English takes practice and concentration, and it provides hope but also loss (Garcia McCall, 2011, p. 34, 36-38; Alire Sáenz, 2012, pp. 94-95; Agosín, 2014, p. 180, 182, 214; Engle, 2015, p. 13,26). Engle (2015) wonders if her bilingualism will always necessitate a choice between two ways of thinking (p. 13), and Dante’s lack of Spanish and his mother’s education makes him feel disconnected from Mexican culture and his Mexican family members (Alire Sáenz, 2012, pp. 86-88, 269). As she learns English in Maine, Celeste’s voice feel unfamiliar to herself (Agosín, 2014, p. 182), and her English is not enough for others to accept her (pp. 180-181), until her teacher suggests she teach some Spanish to the class (p. 197). Agosín had also struggled learning English and fitting in with her American peers when she moved to Athens, Georgia at 14, hiding in a closet to avoid going to school and writing “in Spanish because it was the only part of her identity she felt she could hold on to” (Jaafari, 2014). Each of these characters have an uneasy relationship to English, and question its value in their life. On the other hand, Garcia McCall describes Under the Mesquite as being about Lupita’s
experience “living the American dream, trying to fit in” (DeLeón, 2011, September 28) and in this quest, Lupita is surprised to learn that she has an accent, and her teacher, Mr. Cortes, who suggested she lose it, laughs at her surprise that she has one (Garcia McCall, 2011, p. 67). He taught Lupita how to lose her accent, using many Blow-Pops, an experience that mimics the author’s own experience (Lee & Low Books, 2018), which she describes as valuable.

**Borderless**

Borderless Exile is an in-between space between difference and normalcy and Celeste’s grandmother describes it as “belong[ing] everywhere and nowhere at all” which Celeste decides leads to “always” having “a bit of a broken heart” (Agosín, 2014, p. 280). Engle also describes the feeling of being “two people/ at the same time,” with everything “com[ing] from two/ different/ worlds” (2015, p. 58), musing on this throughout the book (p. 72, 102). The subtitle of her memoir, *Enchanted Air*, is *Two Cultures, Two Wings*, which she says “refers to the sense of freedom I gained by traveling back and forth between my parents’ two homelands, two languages and two histories” (Ratzan, 2015, August 4). Acknowledging that these characters can be different from the mainstream while belonging within it powerfully allows for “social justice for all” (Valdes, 1997, pp. 1093-1094) without placing specific demands on qualifiers for belonging.

LatCrit advocates for “the cultivation of community and coalition” (Valdes, 1997, p. 1094) and Hernández-Truyol (2011) states that Latinx people are uniquely qualified to build bridges with a “multi-layered approach” “because of our many components” and
experiences of “multi-dimensionality” (p. 28). This is seen as Celeste questions whether the sky and stars are the same in the United States and Chile (Agosín, 2014, pp. 145-146), and contemplates the sky’s lack of borders (p. 210). Lupita cherishes her family’s ability to easily cross the border back to Mexico to see family be be “true Mexicans for a day” (Garcia McCall, 2011, pp. 10, 143), a privilege that diminishes as their finances dwindle. This fluidity and lack of interest in borders expands struggles and coalition with Latinas/os and other groups who are marginalized (Valdes, 1997, pp.1093-1094).

Celeste’s aunt explains how “even if our own lives are in danger, we don’t abandon others. That is solidarity” (Agosín, 2014, p. 225-226), which reflects Agosín’s own beliefs that anyone can turn into a refugee and “we all need the kindness of strangers” (Bardales, 2009, April 16). Racial divisions are muddled in Enchanted Air (Engle, 2015, p. 66) which describes Engle’s confusion over which fountain she is meant to drink from in the South and her decision to drink from both.

**Schneider Winners**

All five Schneider award winners in this study are novels. Three are contemporary realistic fiction, one is a realistic story set in two time periods, and one is a fantasy novel in a medieval setting. Brian Selznick’s Wonderstruck (2011) is the earliest winner, three years after Selznick won the Caldecott for The Invention of Hugo Cabret, and it tells the story of Rose, a girl in the 1920s who is deaf, through pictures, and Ben, a boy in the 1970s who had been deaf in one ear but who loses hearing in the other ear through the course of the novel, through words. Ben’s mother has died and he runs away
to New York City to find his father, but instead finds a friend, Jamie, and his grandmother, Rose, while he hides in the American Museum of Natural History. Selznick has said that his identity as a queer person influenced his interest in “secret places and hidden things” (Alexander, 2017, April 16). The following winner is *A Dog Called Homeless* (Lean, 2012), teacher and author (Lean, 2018) Sarah Lean’s British novel about a girl who continues to see her mother’s spirit and who stops speaking, but who heals after befriending a dog, a homeless man, and a boy who is blind and nearly deaf. In 2014, the award went to Merrie Haskell’s *Handbook for Dragon Slayers*, which tells the story of Tilda, a princess with a pronounced limp, who has an adventure with her friends as they learn about dragons and other magical creatures. The 2015 Schneider award went to *Girls Like Us* by former special education teacher Gail Giles (2014), a novel about two girls, Quincy and Biddy, who know each other from Special Education classes, and who have just graduated and are placed as roommates with each other and employees of the rich and elderly Miss Elizabeth. Gail Giles whose online author bio says that she likes her “friends” and does not like “mean people” (Giles, 2018) talks about fitting in at school but feeling profoundly different from her family at home (Allison, 2015, March 3). The final Schneider award winner of this study is former teacher (Mullaly Hunt, 2018) Lynda Mullaly Hunt’s *Fish in a Tree* (2015), in which, in a classroom with a teacher that attempts to provide a supportive community for all of his students, Ally learns that her reading struggles come from a learning disability. None of the author’s have disclosed any disabilities, although, like her character Ally, Mullaly Hunt struggled with reading as a child (Brightly Editors, 2018).
Challenges of Being Considered Different

The challenges of being considered different for people with disabilities in Schneider award winners include being treated as an Other, negative attitudes from nondisabled people, and isolation.

Otherness

Early in *Fish in a Tree*, Ally experiences deep embarrassment and trouble when she gives her pregnant teacher a card with beautiful flowers on it, not able to read its words and realize it is a sympathy card (Mullaly Hunt 2015, pp. 8-10). But even more than by their impairments, characters in Schneider award winners are disabled and disempowered by the people around them (Ferguson & Nusbaum, 2012, p. 72; Dunn, 2013, p. 94), including educators, peers, and family members, who comment on, restrict, and control their communication, mobility, and education.

In Schneider winners, only *Girls Like Us* (Giles, 2014) includes actual violence based on disability, the only incidents of actual sexual assault in any of the award-winning books (pp. 145-147), but characters with disabilities are mocked by family members (Selznick, 2011, p. 16; Haskell, 2013, p. 46; Giles, 2014, p. 1) and classmates (Giles, 2014, pp. 8-10; Mullaly Hunt 2015, pp. 7, 37, 154-155, 197, 216). This mockery and abuse is challenged both by the characters with disabilities and friendly advocates, as the authors work to empower readers with disabilities to remember their self-worth. Characters with disabilities also must rely on people without disabilities for their communication and mobility (Lean, 2012; Haskell, 2013, pp. 5, 292), which is not
questioned or commented on, and Quincy believes that no one, including police, cares “what happen to girls like us” (Giles, 2014, p. 151). This element of power is complex, because, in *Handbook for Dragon Slayers* (Haskell, 2013), Judith, as a servant, cannot be said to have more power than Tilda, because while Tilda must rely on Judith for her mobility and basic needs, Judith also needs to rely on Tilda for her livelihood.

People without disabilities also feel free to comment on and control the actions and appearances of people with disabilities in the Schneider award winning books (Giles, 2014, p. 15; Haskell, 2013, p. 57; Selznick, 2011, pp. 182-183; 188-189, 382, 428, 484). Family members have a unique degree of power over the lives of people with disabilities, exercising it particularly over their ability to leave their home (Selznick, 2011, pp. 282-283, 286-287; Lean, 2012, p. 144) or to travel (Haskell, 2013, p. 5). Rose’s brother “finally rescued” her from her confinement (Selznick, p. 544), but even as benevolent rescuer, he has power over her fate. However, while most families of people with disabilities are overprotective, Biddy’s grandmother kicks her out as soon as she graduates (Giles, 2014, p. 5). While Biddy’s grandmother’s cruelty is critiqued, the intrusive place of those who are not disabled is taken for granted and not questioned. Only Ally and Quincy show resistance to the people without disabilities who try to help them, and both characters learn that this is stubbornness is an unproductive character flaw.

Educators teach not only knowledge, but manners (Giles, 2014, pp. 56-57, 129, 177-178) and ways to be “normal” (Mullaly Hunt 2015, pp. 175-176). Lean’s description highlights the power dynamics when she presents one teacher as helpful if you need academic support “or if you are the problem,” but “her perfume [makes] it difficult to
breathe around her” (Lean, 2012, p. 24). While all of this assumes those with disabilities need remediation and normalization (Ferguson & Nusbaum, 2013, p. 75), Mr. Daniels in *Fish in a Tree* also teaches acceptance to the peers of people with disabilities (Mullaly Hunt 2015, pp. 26, 244-246), becoming an idealized advocate for Ally, in comparison to previous teachers and her peers. Through the support of Mr. Daniels and her friends, Ally learns to read and accept the message of a poster in the school office which says, “Sometimes the bravest thing you can do is ask for help” (p. 261). The overwhelming power of educators continues as three of the books are written by current or former school teachers, and none are written by people with disabilities.

While the frustrations of being misunderstood and controlled are conveyed, real power is still held by those without disabilities who tell these stories of disability. While it is unclear how many books by people with disabilities were published but not honored, written but not published, or unwritten because of a lack of support, the complete lack of disabled authors at this award-winning table may point to the way that “mainstream society’s unexamined assumptions” about who can write sometimes “result[s] in exclusionary practices” (Dunn, 2013, p. 94). Nonetheless, it is important to note that these books do not present those without disabilities as the heroes. Even though the disabled characters receive help from others, they are capable of many important things and are complete, whole characters. While they disproportionately model the virtue of accepting help, they help others as well, reducing the stigma of help, and none fall into the trope of disabled villain or superhuman who overcomes their disability (Dunn, 2013). As a former struggling reader, Mullaly Hunt considers hearing that “many kids… have
learned to cut themselves a break” by reading her books “to be the greatest gift” of her experience as a writer (Yingling, 2017, March 27).

*Attitudes towards People with Disabilities*

While “disability is a key aspect of human experience” (Society for Disability Studies, n.d.), Schneider winners expose the cultural construction of a label of disability as “an accusation more often than an assessment” (Ferguson & Nusbaum, 2012, p. 73), as characters with disabilities are perceived by others as annoyingly useless (Giles, 2014, p. 2) or actually dangerous (Haskell, 2013, p. 14, 43), “symboliz[ing] the dangerous and inferior” (Ferguson & Nusbaum, 2012, p. 74). Giles wrote her book to “give a voice to her former special education students” because of a lack of published material that reflected their lives (Allison, 2015, March 3). However, she does not claim to incorporate their actual voices or input, and the voice she gives Quincy is immediately critical of Biddy who also has a learning disability, often calling her a fool (Giles, 2014, p. 7, 13, 17-18, 21-22, 44, 67). Quincy (Giles, 2014, p. 42, 123) and Ally (Mullaly Hunt, 2015, p. 23) both believe that they are defective and deserve bad experiences due to their disabilities. In the beginning of *Wonderstruck* (Selznick, 2011), Ben can hear in one ear, and he refers to it as his “good ear” (pp. 26, 69, 94, 136), a common turn of phrase that treats the deaf ear as inherently bad.

Other than the phrase “good ear,” all of these negative experiences and beliefs are questioned and examined by the disabled characters and those around them and none of the characters are forced to give up or recover from their disabilities in order to be
considered valuable (Ferguson & Nusbaum, 2012, p. 75; Stratman, 2015, p. 103).

However Tilda thinks that, as a ruler, her cruel cousin would “make everyone happier” (Haskell, 2013, p. 72) because he doesn’t have a disability. Complicatedly, as the book forces her to reexamine and positively evaluate her strengths, it is her nondisabled peers who decide that she should push herself to remain the ruler. Quitting due to a low self-concept or spontaneously abandoning her important responsibilities would not be ideal, but her decision should be in her own hands (Ferguson & Nusbaum, 2012, p. 74). The children at Angela’s Hospice are not the focus of *A Dog Called Homeless*, but the power of that hospice and its employees over the children is stated as the narrator explains that they “care for sick children and try and make their wishes come true (Lean, 2012, p. 17). These books challenge the construction of disability as a problem but do not allow for the full agency of people with disabilities.

*Isolation*

Tilda’s response to her experiences is to isolate herself by choosing not to tell Judith about the slights she’s experienced due to her disability (Haskell, 2013, p. 17). Ally’s mother doesn’t understand that Ally is being mocked by classmates who misinterpret her disability (Mullaly Hunt, 2015, p. 29), and she often feels alone in her disability (p. 114-115). Selznick presents deafness as isolating through text that describes Ben’s identification with being an alien (2011, p. 195) and illustrations that show Rose alone (pp. 140-141), unnoticed (pp. 244-245, 248-249) or even eyed suspiciously by inanimate posters (pp. 246-247). Rose even writes a secret note saying, “I wish I
Belonged somewhere” (pp. 350-351). Each of these experiences can build empathy in the reader, and the isolation of the characters illuminates the ways in which disability is socialized. While the characters do find community, only Ben and Rose find it among others with disabilities (who are also family members).

**Celebrating Strength and Uniqueness**

Characters with disabilities are presented as resilient and justifiably proud, as they find support from friends and family, in Schneider award winning books. They are carefully presented uniquely and not as a monolith.

**Resilience and pride**

Help for characters with disabilities is sometimes condescending or cruel, such as when Rose’s teacher’s book’s insistence that “spoken language brings the child more closely into contact with the world,” instead of respecting deaf people’s own modes of communication (Selznick, 2011, pp. 188-189). Selznick shows us Rose’s strength, creativity and resiliency as she turns that condescending book into a beautiful paper sculpture of a city (pp. 192-193). While Rose’s resilient pride is subversive, Ally finds pride in authentic school accomplishments (Mullaly Hunt, 2015, pp. 78, 257) and Biddy feels “extra special about graduating. Like I done something good” (Giles, 2014, p. 11). Both Mullaly Hunt (Schoemann-McCann, 2015, April 16) and Giles (Allison, 2015, March 3) come to this belief in their characters’ strength and resilience from their own
experiences of overcoming challenges, believing that it is an important message to impart. As former school teachers, neither author questions the importance of school accomplishments, finding real worth and value in their characters’ perceived success.

The success is both framed as a battle against the disability and against the “the limitations of attitudes, environments, contexts, and practices” (Ferguson & Nusbaum, 2012, p. 75) of others that would hold them back from such success and accomplishment.

**Friends and family**

Ng (2003) encourages “acknowledg[ing] explicitly that we are all gendered, racialized, and differently constructed subjects who do not participate in interactional relations as equals” (p. 205), and in these books, ideal friends do this on a personal level as they are aware of but not overly focused on the characters’ disabilities, providing both physical and emotional support, as well as defense against cruelty (Selznick, 2011, pp. 404-405; Haskell, 2013, pp. 34, 73-74, 122-123, 149, 290; Giles, 2014, pp. 50, 96, 160, 198, 210; Mullaly Hunt 2015, pp. 7-8, 137-140, 142, 246-249). The books do not often actively question the meaning of disability, with nondisabled friends more likely to encourage their disabled friends to forget their disability than to embrace it. The exception is Ally’s very smart friend Albert who tries to universalize and valorize Ally’s dyslexia in response to Shay’s bullying (Mullaly Hunt, 2015, pp. 246-249), pushing against the “unexamined assumptions that result in [her] exclusionary practices” (Dunn, 2013, p. 94).
These ideal friends make the books pedagogical for those who see the books as windows into the experience of those with disabilities, but when normally guarded Quincy tells Miss Elizabeth that Biddy has been teaching her “lots,” most importantly “how to be nice to folks that never hurt me” (Giles, 2014, p. 174), the message is clearly for those who find a mirror in Quincy. Similarly, family member’s love is felt most strongly when they do not see the disability as a burden (Selznick, 2011, p. 548; Lean, 2012; Mullaly Hunt 2015, p. 52).

From the moment she enters his apartment and his life, Callie believes her neighbor, Sam, is magical (Lean, 2012, pp. 71, 93, 109-110, 117, 127-130, 174-175, 185-187), particularly how he helps her see herself and the world differently (pp. 135-136, 145-147, 182-185). In turn, she wants to be inclusive, attempting to use language about music that doesn’t leave him out (p. 173). Magical abilities are a common trope about disability, and this magical perception ultimately centers Callie and her growth, rather than Sam who remains the same insightful, magical being throughout the novel, while Callie learns about herself and the world. Sam’s mother adds to Callie’s romantic vision of him when she tells Callie that he has “his own way of seeing things [and] likes people to make up their own minds what he’s saying” (p. 78). While Coretta Scott King and Pura Belpré winners are written by people who share the themed identity characteristics with their characters, taking a personal stake in the challenging, celebratory, or normalizing treatment of their characters, these Schneider authors do not share the characteristics that are salient for the award. For these authors, the shift from celebration of difference to claiming normalcy centers and idealizes nondisabledness, as though it is
a gift they can bestow on their characters with disabilities, rather than an imperfect construct.

Within group difference

Each of the Schneider winners features characters with a different disability, presenting each as a distinct experience that is both different from other disabilities and that is experienced uniquely by the character, which is an important statement about the full personhood of each person with a disability. Quincy explains that “Speddies can tell you what kind of retard we are” (Giles, 2014, pp. 2-3), and explains that her disabilities are unique and others have different types of “dys” and strengths (pp. 100-102). This is deliberate for Giles who wanted to show that “the differences between the differently abled and any other group of people are about the same” (Olson & Ownes, 2014, December 3). She writes both characters as using incorrect grammar, which at times seems condescending, but to make the story as authentic and respectful as possible, she and her editor made “lists and charts to make the grammar mistakes pertinent and singular” to the characters (Olson & Ownes, 2014, December 3). Ironically, Haskell presents disabilities other than Tilda’s limp in negative and flat, stereotypical ways. Tilda longs for a “mute servant” (Haskell, 2013, p. 175), and Tilda’s anger with her dangerous cousin Ivo leads her to break with her ethics that “a princess does not mock those of lesser ability and intelligence” and comments on his use of a complex word (p. 48).
Normalcy

Characters in the Schneider Award winning books who have disabilities claim normalcy and desire equal treatment as well.

Claiming normalcy

The woman who comes to evaluate Callie, who Callie expected would think she was very strange, finds normalcy in Callie’s ability to laugh at her (Lean, 2012, p. 163). Biddy also understands that she is worth more than people seem to see, because not only is it unkind to call people’s names, calling people “White Trash” is particularly grievous, because “trash is something you throw away” and “you don’t throw anybody away” (Giles, 2014, p. 1). These moments in Schneider winners cause the reader to question standard hierarchies that privilege and disprivilege (Willis et al, 2008. p. 5; McLaren in Steinberg, et al, 2006, p. 150), but this questioning is not always sustained. Later in the book, Biddy insists to the reader that she has normal skills like the ability to tell time (p. 139), and her roommate Quincy also emphasizes her own normalcy to her coworkers (pp. 100-102). This normalizes herself in some ways, although at the same time, it still marginalizes visible and noticeable intellectual disabilities (Meyer, 2013). Ally is amazed when she realizes she can do something “as well as everyone else” (Mullaly Hunt, 2015, p. 78).

As she develops as a character throughout Girls Like Us, Biddy realizes that “other peoples in this world got as much trouble learning as I do” (Giles, 2014, p. 61). After being called “the Island of Misfit Toys,” Ally and her friends discuss whether the
misfits from the film are actual misfits, because Albert believes that “something is not a misfit simply because it has a different name” (Mullaly Hunt 2015, pp. 93-95). Ally’s classmate, Oliver, is excited to learn about Ally’s dyslexia, jealous of what he perceives as something that could make reading more interesting. This leads her to “realize” everyone has heavy concrete “blocks to drag around,” and agree with her teacher’s belief that the solution is “grit” and being unafraid of making mistakes (pp. 244-246). Biddy and Ally do not need to lose her disability to consider themselves normal, but they still must work much harder to fit into the world around them than the world around them works to accommodate them (Dunn, 2013, p. 94).

Equal treatment

Tilda longs for a time when her talents make everyone, on into future generations, forget that she has a disability (Haskell, 2013, pp. 23-24). While disability should not be considered the most important element of a person, it can also be understood simply as an element of human difference. Respectful treatment comes from unlikely sources, such as in A Dog Called Homeless (Lean, 2012), when Callie’s brother asks what is wrong with Sam, their dad, who is often portrayed as brusque and insensitive, jumps in to say that there's not actually anything wrong with Sam and “he just can’t see and hear” (pp. 80-81), and in Biddy’s surprise that the man at the store doesn't make fun of her when he recognizes that she’s “challenged” (Giles, 2014, p. 91). Quincy is surprised that both the police (Giles, 2014, pp. 208-209) and Miss Elizabeth (p. 199) take her seriously. Safety and respect should not be hierarchical or a privilege rather than a right, but that is not
addressed. Instead, the important relief of feeling safe is the author and characters’ primary concern.

**Stonewall Winners**

In 2012, the third year that the Stonewall award had a designated Children’s and Young Adult award in addition to Literature and Non-fiction characters, the winner was novelist, playwright and director, Bil Wright’s *Putting Makeup on the Fat Boy*, about Carlos, a teenage boy who wants to be a makeup artist to stars, as he navigates friendship, multiple jobs, his sister Rosalia’s abusive boyfriend, and his crush on the straight Gleason (Wright, 2011). The following year, the award went to *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* by Benjamin Alire Sáenz, which also won the Pura Belpré award (Alire Sáenz, 2012). The award winner for 2014 that this study focuses on (it was a co-winner with *Fat Angie* by e.E. Charlton-Trujillo) was Kirstin Cronn-Mills’s *Beautiful Music for Ugly Children* about Gabe, a trans guy who is passionate about music, and who finds both increasing acceptance and danger through his radio show (Cronn-Mills, 2012).

In 2015, the winner was a picture book, *This Day in June*, Gayle E. Pitman’s first children’s book (Pitman, 2018), which celebrates the beauty and excitement of a Pride Parade (Pitman, 2014). In 2016, the award split into Children’s or Young Adult, and this study looks at Young Adult book *The Porcupine of Truth* by Bill Konigsberg, former sportswriter and current Creative Writing professor (Konigsberg, 2018), which is told from the perspective of straight Carson, who develops a strong friendship with Aisha, a lesbian who has been kicked out of her house, as they got on a road trip to learn about his
grandfather before his father dies. On their journey, they develop a new relationship to spirituality and discover that Carson’s grandfather was gay (Konigsberg, 2015). Three of the winners are contemporarily set novels, one is a novel set in the recent past, and one is a picture book, set at a time of year but not a specific year. Cronn-Mills is the only author (Cronn-Mills, 2018) who does not openly identify as GLBT in some way.

Challenges of being considered different

GLBT characters in Stonewall award winning books experience abuse, otherness, and negative attitudes because of being considered different.

Abuse

Miller (2015) reminds us that when queer people “are not accepted, bodies are open to violence” due to the “anxiety for those threatened by their inadequacies of not reading others” (pp. 38-39). In each of the Stonewall winning novels, GLBT characters are threatened, injured (Wright, 2011, p. 55-56; Alire Sáenz, 2012, pp. 306-309; Cronn-Mills, 2012, p. 129, 141, 168-171, 174, 200-201), and killed (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 331) and so are their friends (Wright, 2011, p. 210; Cronn-Mills, 2012, pp. 192-193, 225-228). Gabe is acutely aware of the dangers to himself (Cronn-Mills, 2012, pp. 23, 76, 128) and poignantly says, “I hope they don't kill me. Things are just getting good” (Cronn-Mills, 2012, p. 209). Characters are discriminated against (Konigsberg, 2015, pp. 36, 157-158) and often cruelly insulted for their sexuality and identity (Alire Sáenz, 2012, 205-206;
Wright, 2011, p. 9, 35, 202-204; Cronn-Mills, 2012, pp. 30-31; Konigsberg, 2015, p. 40). Cronn-Mills was cautious about including violence, because “it seems sort of stereotypical,” but she also sees it as “an undercurrent of many trans* individuals’ lives” (Vee, 2014, June 23), and Konigsberg has cautioned young readers to consider their outside support systems before coming out (Konigsberg, 2015, September 15). The contemporary settings of these novels present this abuse as a current phenomenon, rather than a relic of the past, something that GLBT readers may know, but that non-GLBT readers may be less aware of.

*Otherness*

In *Putting Makeup on the Fat Boy* (Wright, 2011), the usually sassy and fashion-forward Carlos retreats to the back of the bus when a young girl comments on his traditionally feminine clothing and an elderly African American woman chalks the comment up to childhood innocence (pp. 142-144). GLBT characters also do not feel protected by the police, believing that police are not on their side (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 327; Cronn-Mills, 2012, pp. 142, 168-171), even though at least one heterosexual friend insists that they seek police help because “everyone deserves to be safe” (Cronn-Mills, 2012, pp. 146-147). Other characters can choose to stick by GLBT characters, as Gleason does (Wright, 2011, p. 205), or they can choose to abandon them, as Paige temporarily does (Cronn-Mills, 2012, pp. 193-198). Whether they choose to stick by or not, the choice is always theirs, while the GLBT character must always stay themselves. Even those religious people who “came through and cared for the dying” in the early
days of the HIV/AIDS crisis in San Francisco, in opposition to the national neglect and shaming, had the power to choose whether or not to care for them (Konigsberg, 2015, pp. 260-261).

For parents of GLBT characters, the bar for good parenting is set low, as when Gabe feels lucky that his parents haven’t “kick[ed] him out yet” (Cronn-Mills, 2012, pp. 21-22), and his family has a hard time understanding his gender or how important it is for him to be referred to correctly, pointedly mourning the loss of who they thought he was (pp. 50-51, 65-67, 155-156). Aisha’s father kicks her out and denies her resources (pp. 42-47), but her mother tells her to be patient with him (Konigsberg, 2015, pp. 309-310). This is parallel to how Carson’s grandfather was encouraged to leave his family because he was gay (p. 317). Even as this abuse and inferior treatment is portrayed as a problem, it is not presented as anything other than the typical and expected cost of GLBT identity.

**Attitudes towards GLBT Characters**

In the winners of the Stonewall award, straight people believe that GLBT people should tone down their queerness to be accepted (Konigsberg, 2015, pp. 154-155; Wright, 2011, pp. 1, 25), and should not be in their “Connecticut country” homes (Wright, 2011, pp. 144-145). While the novels push against these attitudes, the negative opinions are internalized, such as when Carlos scolds himself for his unmasculine inability to protect himself or his sister (Wright, 2011, p. 83, 89), and Carlos feels accepted because Gleason doesn't throw him across the room because he kissed his cheek (p. 113). Both Dante and Gabe think of themselves as worthy targets of violence (Alire
Sáenz, 2012, p. 341; Cronn-Mills, 2012, p. 235), Gabe has felt like “a freak” from an early age (p. 12). Obviously negative opinions of GLBT people are questioned, but even as he develops confidence in his identity, Gabe and his best friend discuss how “nobody wants… a guy with a pussy” “to steal their girlfriend” as though that idea is reasonable (p. 231), finding humor in that element of his attack (p. 230). Neither Gabe, Paige, or Cronn-Mills say anything to challenge the “underlying assumption” (Willis, 2008, p. 5) that this kind of queer attraction and expression is humorously unacceptable and surprising, and so they condone the symbolic boundaries that keep Gabe a cultural outsider (Hall, 1997, pp. 236-237). The costs of this kind of internalized queerphobia is more deliberately illustrated in Turk’s story of Carson’s grandfather, who couldn’t make himself be straight, instead turning to drinking, and becoming cruel and distant to his family before eventually leaving (Konigsberg, 2015, p. 262).

Dante doesn’t think he can be a real Mexican and still like boys, but Ari tells him that he doesn’t think “liking boys is an American invention” (Alire Sáenz, 2012, pp. 273-274). Meanwhile, their classmate accuses Ari of being less Mexican because he won’t do drugs with him, calling him gay as an insult (pp. 205-206). As Dante comes to term with his queer identity, he hopes that his unborn sibling will be straight, for his parents’ sake (p. 252), and considers Ari “innocent” for not knowing what a “transvestite” is (p. 331). Alire Sáenz is keenly aware of the “hatred and animosity towards our community” and he states that “our children” are also “very much aware of it,” internalizing the hatred (Barisich, 2017, March 1) as Dante does, unable to believe that his parents could accept that part of him. Both the identity of being gay and the identity of being Mexican are played off of each other by different characters, as though they cannot reasonably exist in
the same body, or that the gayness is an unreasonable taint on an already contentious identity. Dante’s family and Ari’s respectful response to Dante create a story that expands and connects struggles against “all forms of oppression” (Valdes, 1997, 1094) and “make space for those” who don’t typically fit (Crisp, 2011, p. 197).

The introduction of Gabe’s trans identity to the reader is presented with a flourish, rather than as a matter-of-fact statement (Cronn-Mills, 2012, p. 3), Aisha’s sexuality doesn’t get revealed in *The Porcupine of Truth* until a barista mocks her because of it (Konigsberg, 2105, p. 40), and Carson’s grandfather’s sexuality is revealed even more dramatically, as it is the big family secret that sends Carson on a multi-state quest (pp. 266-267). While queer theory troubles “normative structures” (Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2013, p. 146), these books over-emphasize this troubling, making their characters’ sexuality or gender identity an event and a problem for the characters around them. Cronn-Mills did not want to write an “issue book” that was too “preachy,” and while much of her description of Gabe is authentic and treats him as “a music nerd who happens to be trans*” (Vee, 2014, June 23), the beginning flourish sets his trans identity as an issue to be grappled with and solved in some way, like Aisha’s and Carson’s grandfather’s sexualities. In the face of these difficulties, Queer Theory “highlights and encourages a proliferation of identity categories, and both denots and celebrates outlaw, uncontrolled, unruly subjectivities” (Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2013, p. 146), and in these novels, GLBT characters show strength through their resilience.
Celebrating Strength and Uniqueness

Stonewall winners celebrate their characters’ resilience and freedom, the variety of GLBT people, and the ways in which those who are not GLBT support those who are.

Resilience and freedom

While Gabe faced high school with the wrong name and identity, wanting to “just be a dude with normal, regular stuff in his life” (Cronn-Mills, 2012, p. 151), he finally chooses to “let my B side play,” no matter how it is received by others (p. 10). Aisha bravely writes a vulnerable and powerful letter to her father about being a lesbian (Konigsberg, 2015, pp. 209-210), but eventually must decide “I can’t make him do the right thing. I just have to take care of me” (p. 316). Ari is impressed by Dante, “funny and focused and fierce,” without “anything mean about him.” He doesn’t understand “how you could live in a mean world and not have any of that meanness rub off on you” (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 19). He is so impressed that he tells Dante he’s not normal, asking him where he came from (p. 103). Coming from most other people, this fascination with his difference could be a conscious or unconscious attempt to “stigmatize” or “expel” Dante as threatening (Hall, 1997, p. 237), but even as Ari remarks about this difference as alien, it comes from a place of deep love and respect, which may come from Ari’s awareness of his own difference.

Being able to express their identity and sexuality is a huge source of strength for these GLBT characters, as in real life it can give people an “internal safety that has limitless possibility” (miller, 2015, p. 31), and the authors present this self-expression as
important and healthy. Even though they realistically represent some elements of the
danger from others due to this self-expression, it is never presented as a rightful
punishment for too much freedom or queerness. Carlos claims to never care what others
think, because “I never look like anyone else, and that's the point” (Wright, 2011, p. 10),
while Gabe envisions and works towards a new vision of himself, experiencing relief and
joy with each step (Cronn-Mills, 2012, pp. 27-28, 98-99, 132-139), playing with gender
(pp. 122-123), and encouraging others to express themselves (pp. 41-43), and Ari is
elated when he realizes he is no longer afraid or ashamed of loving Dante (Alire Sáenz,
2012, pp. 357-359). Pitman’s This Day in June (2014) proclaims the ways that during the
Pride parade, “this day in June, we’re all UNITED!” and much of the language of the
book focuses on the joyous nature of that pride, such as the rhymes “Rainbow arches/
Joyful marches.” To Pitman, her book “is really about being who you are, and not
apologizing for it” (Enderle, 2016, March 15), and the best part about “the magical world
of writing for children” is sharing what she loves with them, “while also providing them
with a joyful vision of what our collective futures could be” (Pitman, 2018).

**Within group difference**

GLBT identity includes a range of sexualities and genders, and the Stonewall
award winning books include representation across the range, but while in This Day in
June, Pitman honors a range of GLBT identities, including Dykes on Bikes, the Sisters of
Perpetual Indulgence, and GLBT people with families (2014), the characters in the
Stonewall award-winning novels are isolated from other GLBT characters. The only
other GLBT character in Beautiful Music for Ugly Children is the singer of a very badly done karaoke song, in the background of a scene (Cronn-Mills, 2012, p. 46). Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe has a little bit more GLBT representation, with the announcement of Ari’s kind aunt’s sexuality after she dies (Alire Sáenz, 2012, pp. 262, 285-286), and the troubling introduction of the nameless cross-dressing or transgender prostitute who was killed by Ari’s brother (Alire Sáenz, 2012, pp. 331-332). Carson’s grandfather and his partner are the secondary GLBT characters presented with the most depth, and Carson is surprised that his late grandfather’s partner, Turk, can be “a Jew who goes to a church and loves the Dalai Lama” (Konigsberg, 2015, p. 285). These characters could all benefit from larger GLBT communities, which exist for many GLBT youth, and which are seen in This Day in June.

GLBT characters hope for and search for representation, like when Gabe contemplates the crotch of a statue of his town’s founding father, thinking he may not actually have a “dick” and could be a trans man like Gabe (Cronn-Mills, 2012, p. 69), and Aisha thinks she’s heard that all penguins are gay (Konigsberg, 2015, p. 54). Turk, Carson’s late grandfather’s partner, reminisces about the formation of the Castro neighborhood (pp. 258-259). While Carson thinks that perhaps Aisha’s penguin hypothesis is far-fetched, these quests for queer representation are presented respectfully.

Other people

Even though these characters do not have queer community, characters in each of the novels have friends and community. As Gabe comes out as trans, his allies (primarily
John and Paige) need to learn new skills such as remembering to call him by his name and pronoun, which they both clumsily work at (Cronn-Mills, 2012, pp. 43, 58, 59, 159-160), and John tries to help Gabe normalize his feelings (p. 76) and identity (pp. 39, 150). Respect for his humanity by his peers (p. 225), employer (p. 90), and the police (pp. 229-230) surprises Gabe, even as he welcomes it. He is amazed by his radio show fan club, concerned more about losing them than for his own physical safety (p. 131), wholeheartedly thanking them for “accepting” him (p. 255).

Although Aisha is kicked out by her own father, she is welcomed and respected by Carson’s family (Konigsberg, 2015, pp. 60-61) and a straight couple who she and Carson stay with (p. 127). Turk, Carson’s late grandfather’s partner, tired of “assholes highjacking organized religion,” counsels Aisha that her father’s choice to kick her out of his home because she was gay was neither Christlike nor Christian, and that instead “he’s living in fear” (p. 283), strong advice from another GLBT character. Family love is also evident in some of the award winners. Ari’s parents try to take away Ari’s internalized shame at loving Dante, (Alire Sáenz, 2012, 347-350), and although his family is initially leery of Gabe’s trans identity, they begin to show acceptance (Cronn-Mills, 2012, pp. 84, 91-92, 118-119). Like within the Schneider winners, these relationships provide respectful models for those who come to these books as windows, as the acceptance in the books make the GLBT characters feel and appear normal.
Normalcy

For GLBT characters, normalcy is not an exact match to heterosexual life, but instead a “socially recognized” existence and way of life (Bower and Klecka, 2009, p. 233). Carlos insists that he is more normal than his coworkers think, which includes insisting that he doesn’t wear makeup (or at least not much makeup) (Wright, 2011, p. 170), a pushback against stereotypes that unfortunately problematizes gay boys and men who do wear makeup. As he begins to live his life as a guy, Gabe has to learn to perform the gender norms of the identity he is finally beginning to publicly inhabit (Cronn-Mills, 2012, pp. 4-5, 75, 91, 95, 113; 154-155). When he gets a job at a record store, he skips to his car, but he believes “it really, really, really isn’t manly” so he looks around before he does it (p. 95) and thinks a sign of his burgeoning normal masculinity is that boys want to fight him (pp. 229-230). All of these are presented in a matter-of-fact way that does not question their importance for masculine identity, even as they are constricting and dangerous.

As she confronts her father about his reaction to her lesbianism, Aisha attempts to leverage his perception of her normalcy as a member of his family (Konigsberg, 2015, pp. 209-210), and she loves San Francisco’s Castro because she feels appreciated rather than standing out as different (p. 281). At the end of the book, Carson realizes that he loves sharing food with the people he cares about, who are “crazy-ass, totally imperfect people like [him]” (p. 314). Konigsberg effectively celebrates both the existence (RUComingOut, 2018) of GLBT characters as part of regular life, and resists “binary, fixed, and taken-for-granted types of social organization” (Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth,
Including GLBT characters in literature is still a powerful act, especially when characters “reject a homophobic view of the world,” as these characters do, even in the face of those who embrace such a view. This rejection of a homophobic view “can be a lifesaving act of rebellion, a push against a status quo that does not include us” (Jimenez, 2015, p. 409). Nonetheless, in their claiming normalcy, sometimes they leave other GLBT people behind.

**Newbery Winners**

While the Newbery award is not presented to books about a specific identity experience, the books that win have protagonists who are unique with differences that are sometimes constructed as problematic by those around them. The 2012 Newbery winner, *Dead End in Norvelt* by Jack Gantos (Gantos, 2011) is loosely based on his own childhood experiences, as are other books he’s written. The fictionalized Jack Gantos is grounded and forced to help his elderly neighbor, Miss Volker, type her contributions to the newspaper and learn why elderly citizens of their town are quickly dying, while he faces nosebleeds, expectations of masculinity, annoying neighbors, and Hell’s Angels. In 2013, *The One and Only Ivan* by Katherine Applegate (Applegate, 2012) received the award. This tells the story of a gorilla who has lived most of his life in captivity, and who uses his painting skills to craft a message that expose the cruel treatment and inadequate conditions he and other animals are experiencing. The next year’s winner was Kate DiCamillo’s *Flora and Ulysses: The Illuminated Adventures* (DiCamillo, 2013), about a girl named Flora who identifies as a cynic, her disconnection from her romance
novelist mother, and her adventures with a newly aware and perceptive squirrel who she names Ulysses. It is told both from Flora and Ulysses’s perspectives. The 2015 award went to *The Crossover* by Kwame Alexander (Alexander, 2014), a free verse poetic novel from the point of view of Josh, an African American teenager, about his love of basketball, his twin, and his father, a former basketball store who has health problems that lead to his death before the end of the book. Unlike these novels, the final Newbery award winner in this study was a picture book, *Last Stop on Market Street* by Matt de la Peña (de la Peña, 2015), which follows CJ, an African American boy and his grandmother on their bus trip as they contemplate the merits of riding the bus, such as the vibrant variety of people who ride with them, on their way to serve food at a soup kitchen.

In this study’s contemplation of difference, I specifically consider Jack Gantos’s experience with bloody noses and nontraditionally masculine behavior, Ivan’s and Ulysses’s lives as animals, Flora’s identification as a cynic, Josh’s race and experience as a twin, and CJ’s experience as an African American bus rider, as forms of difference. Because the Coretta Scott King award focuses on African American identity, I am interested in how the Newbery addresses race, in addition to how the other experiences make the characters seem and feel different from the people around them.

**Challenges of being considered different**

Characters in Newbery winners experience some challenges of difference, but generally not to the extent of the identity-focused awards, except for Ivan and the other
animals in his book who experience some of the greatest difficulty due to their difference. Ivan lives in a domain where humans watch (Applegate, 2012, p. 14) and taunt him until he throws his poop at them (p. 41), while Mack, the owner of the mall where Ivan lives, calls Ruby, the baby elephant, “stupid” (p. 71) when she doesn’t comply with his commands. Mack also ignores Stella’s foot infections (pp. 30-31) until she dies of related complications (pp. 106-114) and both Ivan and Ruby had family members who were brutally killed by humans (pp. 81, 170-171). In another book, Ulysses, the squirrel, remembers threats and abuse from humans in the past (DiCamillo, 2013, p. 76). The fictional and human Jack Gantos is teased by girls for his lack of strength (Gantos, 2011, p. 245) and his exuberant language (p. 256), both traditionally considered feminine traits. The real Jack Gantos remembers the slights of being considered a slow reader (Gantos, 2018) and the isolation of living on the “fringe” of social groups (Gregg, 2001), and he is sensitive to the ways characters who are considered different based on their behavior are left out of literature and off library shelves (Danielson, 2007, November 8).

Stereotypes and low opinions of the characters’ difference include the belief that gorillas are violent (Applegate, 2012, pp. 9, 65), and that squirrels are diseased (DiCamillo, 2013, p. 56). These stereotypes are both shown to be unfounded. CJ and Flora feel isolated because of their difference. Even though CJ’s nana emphasizes the luxury of meeting “Bobo [and] the Sunglass Man,” “CJ stare[s] out the window feeling sorry for himself” (de la Peña, 2015) because he has to ride the bus when his peers do not, while Flora copes with her sense of isolation at her mother’s love for a shepherdess lamp by deciding that she “didn’t care whether her mother loved her or not” (DiCamillo, 2013, p. 30). Flora’s sense of isolation is often presented as valid, although her mother
shows that she cares about her at the very end of the novel. White people have some element of control over Josh’s family, when Josh’s father is pulled over for a broken taillight while Josh is in the car, but race is never mentioned in the incident (Alexander, 2014, pp. 124-127), making it unclear if racial motivation is part of the point of the incident.

**Celebrating strength and uniqueness**

Protagonists in Newbery award winners find specialness and comfort in their difference. Ivan finds bittersweet comfort in remembering his past (Applegate, 2012, pp. 125-126) and he explains to his reader that gorillas choose to knuckle walk, rather than assimilate to walking upright, because it’s more fun (p. 2). From his perspective, gorillas are special and their babies have a unique experience that human babies can’t have, getting “to spend the day riding on his mother’s back, like a cowboy on a horse” (p. 127). The author’s use of first person to gain insight into his thoughts shows him to be sympathetic and complex. DiCamillo’s Flora believes her “um, different, [s]pecial” (DiCamillo, 2013, p. 120) squirrel could be a superhero, which turns out to be somewhat true and she believes her own cynicism makes her unable to be alarmed or surprised (p. 59), which does not turn out to be true. In the beginning of *The Crossover*, Josh has locks, and lists five reasons for having them, including always knowing “one day/ I’d need/ my own wings/ to fly” (Alexander, 2014, pp. 14-15), and they are a deep part of his identity and personality. Nana tries to remind CJ that their life is particularly valuable, because “sometimes when you are surrounded by dirt, CJ, you’re a better witness for
what's beautiful" (de la Peña, 2015), which is part of the message that de la Peña wants his readers to take away with them (de la Peña, 2016, June 27).

Applegate’s animals have unique personalities and interests (2012), but most of the other Newbery award winning books have characters who are alone in their difference. Only *The Crossover* (Alexander, 2014) has more than one character who share the traits that make their protagonist different, and in so doing, Alexander reminds readers that African Americans are unique individuals. Josh’s brother JB doesn’t understand or share his brother’s nerdiness or locks (Alexander, 2014, pp. 35, 107). Alexander also explores differences in opinions within an African American family about jazz music (p. 6, 17). Like the Coretta Scott King winners, the representation of difference within African Americans is a counterstory (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 13) to the idea that African Americans are a monolithic group, challenging the idea that only white characters can be considered unique (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 58).

**Normalcy**

Newbery winners often lift up normalcy as a goal and rightly privileged space (Willis et al, 2008, p. 5), and protagonists in Newbery winners during these years also find themselves claiming and wanting normalcy. However, normalcy is not always positive for the characters. In *Dead End in Norvelt* (Gantos, 2011), to be considered “a real man and not some spineless kid,” due, in part, to his bloody noses, Jack drives too fast and lifts too much (p. 257), and allows his neighbor to operate on his nose, even though he doesn’t trust the steadiness of her hands (pp. 138-139). Heterosexual desire is
also assumed and made important for Ivan, the gorilla (Applegate, 2013, p. 247), and all of the males in Josh’s family (Alexander, 2014, p. 19, 54, 172), a normal element of fiction, especially that written for children, but one that marks GLBT identity as different.

Ivan’s owner, Mack, tries to treat him like a human baby (Applegate, 2012, 130), but it feels shameful (p. 132) and ultimately fails (p. 142). Although his attempt at bestowing human normalcy on Ivan fails, Ivan contextualizes gorillas as normal, explaining that the ways that “growing up gorilla” is like “any other kind of growing up” (p. 127), and that gorillas can “count as well as anyone” (p. 144). In Flora & Ulysses: The Illuminated Adventures, Flora’s “heart leap[s] up high in her chest” when she learns that the squirrel is able to communicate with her in some normal, human ways (DiCamillo, 2013, p. 32), and she finds comfort in her normalcy relative to “someone as truly, profoundly strange as William Spiver” (p. 55). However, even as she understands difference to be troubling, she learns that trouble is normal as she reads that “every human being is capable of” “nefarious activities” (p. 91), and Dr. Meescham tells Flora that “we are, all of us, medical emergencies!” (p. 115). In The Crossover, Josh notes that “identical twins/ are no different/ from everyone else,/ except we look and/ sometimes sound/ exactly alike” (Alexander, 2014, p. 105) a humorous and ironic juxtaposition of sameness as difference. CJ notices that even the more normal boys in the back of the bus clap for the guitar player (de la Peña, 2015), making him feel more at ease with his different-feeling situation.
Analysis

The criteria for most of the awards require a positive and authentic portrayal of the group about and for whom the awards are intended (with only the Stonewall and Newbery leaving such requirements out). Books that have earned the award present difference as difficult due to perceptions of otherness and negative attitudes that can lead to abuse, segregation and separation, and cultural disconnection. However, these authentic struggles are countered by equally authentic positive representations of strengths such as resilience, honoring the diversity within each group and the friends, family, and touchstones that keep them strong, and by presentations of each group as normal, either through claims of individual normalcy or a broad celebration of difference as normalcy. A reader who identifies with each of these groups can find mirrors of their experiences, comfort in stories of how other characters coped with the challenges of difference, and deeper historical understanding of their own struggles. A reader who does not identify with these groups can find windows into lives of people whose struggles may not be immediately apparent (Bishop, 1990), a shocking or enlightening glimpse into the lives of others (Lemert, 1995, p. x; Shannon, 1994, pp. 1-2).

The Challenges of Being Considered Different

Slavery and segregation are common tropes in children's literature about African Americans. These are realities in African American history, which should not be forgotten, but it can be exhausting for African American young people to constantly need confront this past abuse. There is a danger that by their constant repetition, children,
regardless of their own race, may think such treatment is somehow deserved. The representations in Coretta Scott King award-winning books are vastly different than the presentation of docile slaves that Taxel found in his 1981 study of children’s novels about the American Revolution, but slavery and segregation are part of a current selective tradition in what is published and honored, that justifies the way things are, based on this history. There is a continued need for a balanced representation, in which the harsh history is acknowledged, but not overly emphasized as the only important element of African American history.

None of the Coretta Scott King Award winners accepts slavery or the abusive treatment that followed as fair, and the nonfiction books, including Woodson’s memoir, uphold the importance of fighting back against the ever-present racist status quo (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 27). However, the two histories (Nelson, 2011; Pinkney, 2012) convey a belief that, because of the work of exceptional African Americans, things are constantly improving. African American literature for children has traditionally been meant to be inspiring and educational to counter ever-present racism (McNair, 2008, p. 8), and that is the focus of the award, but the portrayal of a continuous positive trajectory ignores the perpetual strength of racism.

The consideration of stereotypes in Coretta Scott King Award winning books shows the self-awareness of the narrators, authors, and characters. They are clearly aware of the damaging opinions that surround them. At the same time, while this points to the racism surrounding the characters, the books do not interrogate the ways in which race itself is created and manipulated through these stereotypes.
Challenges for Pura Belpré Award winners often revolve around the difficulties of assimilation, but they find hope in the process as well. Holding on to home culture, even as one assimilates, is presented as a lifeline. Garcia McCall has said that she understands that it is “easy to get lost” in a new world, but she encourages children to say, “This is who I am, this is where I come from,” because for her, “culture is important [,] but so is growth” (Lee & Low Books, 2018). While growth is important, an emphasis on and valuing of assimilation enacts “differentiation and inequality,” as unassimilated qualities become seen as faulty internal attributes (Ng, 2003, p. 212).

Even Latinx people who have attempted to assimilate are “subjected to injustice and prejudice, thereby pushed into positions of marginality and disempowerment” because of perceived or real skin tone, accent, or cultural attributes (Valdes, 1997, p. 1096) and there is often separation between Latinx characters and others, and those dilemmas are presented in the award winners. While the United States is presented as a place of potential safety, complications about redistribution of resources are seen, and the United States is not particularly idealized or welcoming. Often European American characters perceive the Latinx characters as a threat to their comfort and understanding of themselves as normal and mainstream. Representations of these negative responses challenge universalizing assumptions about the United States as a land of opportunity for all, while each character has a unique story of immigration history and the opportunities that that afforded them and their families. All of the characters resist negative representations and stereotypes, in the thoughts that they share with the reader. Celeste, in I Lived in Butterfly Hill, vocally resists the negative representations and stereotypes of her Vermont classmates.
Schneider award winners present the ways in which disability is considered an important difference, and the ways in which others' attitudes shape experiences more than the impairment does. Their disabilities and abilities are often misunderstood by family, friends, educators, and others. While the books critique condescending treatment and the lack of equal participation afforded to people with disabilities, the books are written within the very culture that makes issues of impairments primarily by people who do not have disabilities. This sometimes leads to ironic moments where the characters with disabilities are mouthpieces for ableist terms and assumptions, although much of the most damaging assumptions and stereotypes found in most children's literature with characters with disabilities are absent, and too much of the characters' self-worth is found through interactions with nondisabled characters.

The selective tradition of children's literature has rarely selected GLBT characters. Often considered dangerously deviant by at least some vocal group, representing GLBT characters has often been deemed too risky. GLBT characters who have been traditionally represented have mostly been male, white, and nondisabled. The GLBT characters in the Stonewall award winning novels in this study are also predominantly male, although only one GLBT protagonist is white and one GLBT secondary character is white. Along with the novels is the picture book, This Day in June, which joyfully represents characters of many genders and colors.

However, like in the selective tradition of books that have traditionally been published about GLBT characters, abuse and threats of abuse are very common for characters in Stonewall award winners. While these are the reality for many GLBT people, it can be difficult for young people to read about, because it seems to be deserved
and it makes the world seem threatening. Otherness and its attendant misunderstandings are also a threat throughout the books. The novels that have won awards honor fairly narrow representations of gender and sexuality, with no characters who live outside the gender binary or who experience attraction outside of strict boundaries of gay or straight sexuality. The exceptions are the characters of Aristotle and Dante whose youthful love does not necessarily solidify their sexual identities. This narrow representation would not necessarily be a problem except that there is even discomfort in identity within the boundaries of what is represented. Rather than celebrating the myriad ways of being, living, and loving that Queer Theory promotes, the award winners are cautious. This may be because of the relative newness of the subject matter as an acceptable topic of children's literature, but it represents a misrecognition of what GLBT identity and experiences comprise. Ironically, the picture book, *This Day in June*, is again, the most celebratory of many identities, although it is geared for the youngest audience.

The power imbalances that characters who are considered different in these Coretta Scott King, Pura Belpré, Schneider, and Stonewall award winning books experience are more than cases of individuals having negative attitudes or even enacting power over other individuals. They are examples of “systemic and interpersonal” (Ng, 2003, p. 205) “interactions” that regularly inform the “concrete, intersecting, and complicated” “relations” (pp. 202-203) of race, ethnicity, language, sexuality, gender, ability, and other axes. Hierarchies are organized around these differences (McLaren in Steinberg, et al. 2006, p. 150), and this hierarchy “locates and positions groups within that society’s opportunity structures” (Baca Zinn & Thornton Dill, 1996, pp. 322-323).
The focus of all of the books is to remedy “cultural or symbolic” injustice, in “social patterns of representation, and communication” (Fraser, 1995, p. 71), but while “socioeconomic” injustice (p. 70-71) is a reality for each of the groups that the awards are about and for, Coretta Scott King and Pura Belpré winners most directly examine that (with the exception of Aisha’s being thrown out for being a lesbian). In the Coretta Scott King winners, racism is a part of every character’s life, primarily in broad legal ways that influence how characters and their families exist within the broader world, and the award-winning books work as counterstories to challenge the naturalness and normalcy of racism that the characters experience (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 9; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 7; Lynn & Adams, 2002, p. 88; Brooks, 2008, p. 38; McNair, 2008, p. 7). The power dynamics in Pura Belpré winning books illuminate some of the ways the United States and its laws influence the Latinx experience of difference (Valdes, 1997, p. 1093) both legally and economically, and interpersonally and intimately, as well conditions in other countries that cause migration.

The power that others hold over disabled characters in Schneider winners illustrate the social elements of the disabilities (Ferguson & Nusbaum, 2012, p. 72) and the way that the experience of disability influences understandings of what is normal and what is different (pp. 72-74). The books directly address intimate and interpersonal power differences, but do not confront broader power structures that influence these experiences. The challenges of being different for GLBT characters is made most challenging by those who expect heterosexuality and see the differences as a problem.

Within current Newbery winners, animals experience the most challenges based on their difference. Although they have agency over their lives, it is blocked by humans
who ultimately control them, such as the control Mack the circus mall owner has over Ivan. The struggles that are represented are clearly meant to build empathy, but identification with animal characters can only go so far, positioning the reader as a potential helper, rather than peer. While the animals resist unfair and unkind treatment, they ultimately rely on humans for their well-being, both out of necessity and out of choice. Jack considers the ill-treatment he experiences because of his differences to be well-founded and he internalizes them, while Nana counsels CJ to accept their experiences. In these ways, the Newbery selective tradition presents difference as an acceptable cause for inferior treatment and dependency on those with higher status, while in the case of The Crossover, inferior treatment due to race is not an issue.

Celebrating Strengths and Uniqueness

Representations of African American characters as strong are important, in contrast to all of these damaging challenges. However, respect, recognition, and material wellbeing should not hinge on superhuman qualities. Part of the property of whiteness is the privilege of being successful without needing to be superhuman and the illusion of success as a personal endeavor. While African Americans often need to outperform their white counterparts, the persistent valuing of African Americans with superhuman qualities, even within books for children, does not necessarily break stereotypes, but perpetuates the withholding of equal status to those who do not live up to the superhuman standards.
The expectation of superiority is somewhat tempered by the inclusion of the things and people that each of the characters gain their strength, inspiration, and comfort from. This democratizes the strength, because it clarifies that the strength that exists, comes from the community and is accessible. The property of whiteness, which is often seen in the power of being able to be seen as unique rather than solely as a representative of one's race, is also challenged in these books through representations of a diverse array of African American characters. However, disabled, Latinx, and GLBT characters of any race are not represented in any of the books, presenting the illusion that they do not exist, and that those identities cannot intersect with African American identities.

All of the Coretta Scott King Award winning books are primarily set before the crisis that Lemert describes, and there is a sense of unease from the realities of being ignored and unheard at the time. This is an important perspective, but the complete prevalence of these historical settings sets the reader apart from what is happening in the books. By choosing books that are far outside of the present, it distances readers from the concerns of the books. They present powerful precursors of our current historical moment but they do little to connect current unequal realities to this past. Lemert's theory of the crisis reminds us that the culture that created these unequal realities is still in action. Reminding contemporary readers of stereotyped understandings that white historical figures and fictional characters have had about African Americans illuminates the historic all-pervasiveness of racism and how the property of whiteness has been enshrined and held dear (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Lynn & Adams, 2002; Brooks, 2008; McNair, 2008; Hughes-Haskell et al, 2009). However, because violence against African Americans in the past is not a
surprising story for many, the historical element of the books may separate the reader from contemporary violence towards African Americans, even though laws continue to tend to favor white people, so violence towards African Americans continues to be regularly excused (Lynn & Adams, 2002).

The historic and contemporary characters in Pura Belpré Award winning books are diverse and layered in their interests and personalities, providing a broad scope of Latinx experiences for readers to draw from, as well as appearances and both positive and negative personality traits. While some of the books are set in the past and in part in settings outside of the United States, they show immediate connections to contemporary experiences, attempting to draw the reader away from binary thinking through diverse representations.

As characters who have disabilities within Schneider award winners face negative and condescending attitudes about them, they resist through finding things to be proud of. Their moral worth is not contingent upon developing skills, but overcoming challenges is important to the characters. Regardless of ability, characters and real people find pride in accomplishment, but it is important to ensure that readers do not find the characters valuable only based on their ability to do certain tasks.

While Fraser is skeptical of affirmative redistribution and recognition, and remedies to inequities that reify culture and drastically simplify group identity, she does not advocate for removing awareness of or interest in people's unique experiences that derive from complex layers of inequality. To ignore these experiences and layers of inequality is a form of misrecognition. Characters with disabilities within Schneider winners face well-meaning friends who advocate for this type of forgetting and who
idealize the disabilities, in ways that do not seem ironic or problematic to the author, but friends also serve as important guards against unequal treatment based on disability.

The flourishes with which sexuality and gender identity are presented in many of the Stonewall award winners exist within the affirmative form of recognition that Fraser critiques. The announcements of identities solidify them as static entities rather than allowing for shifts. At the same time, being able to live in and express gender and sexual identities is vital for characters and young people who have been had those things presented as shameful or bad. GLBT characters and young people need the same rights to self-expression and self-definition as straight characters and people. The support they receive from family, friends, and other characters affirms their equal moral worth, in the eyes of the reader.

In many ways DiCamillo's Flora is the ideal Newbery character. She is hyperverbal and hyperliterate, and she is just quirky enough to be interesting, but not as quirky as the boy whose oddities are beyond the pale of what she considers normal or acceptable. Other than Jack, each of the characters in Newbery award winning books thinks of themselves as special, in comparison to those around them. This builds a continued trust in the hierarchies that maintain difference as a problem, as the take characters take such pride in their own uniqueness that they look down on those around them.
Normalcy

A common theme in many of the Coretta Scott King winners is the desire to be recognized as having equal moral worth to anyone else. This is in contrast to the low status that African American characters hold, in the books and in reality. This desire, and the understanding that one does actually have equal moral worth to anyone else, is important for psychic survival. The books present the characters as deserving equal status with white people and as having equal moral worth, even as they also represent the challenges of claiming this equality, and as they situate these claims within a society that historically and consistently favors whiteness. These claims are a powerful and important counterstory to the prevalent selective tradition that calls that equality into question.

While English is held up as important for assimilation, communication, and cultural citizenship in the United States, its meaning is not presented as entirely positive within Pura Belpré Award winners. It holds promise but it is difficult to master and can represent a loss of connection to one's home culture. As the books and characters contemplate the complications of exile and immigration, they question the value of borders, advocating for community, coalition, equal status and participatory parity beyond concepts of nation. In contextualizing the ways that their immigration, language, and family experiences influence how they are treated, these books “challenge the underlying assumptions” about Latinx people “that work in the internal and external worlds to privilege” European Americans (Willis, 2008, p. 5) for young readers, rather than providing a purely cosmetic “diversity of rainbow-colored bodies” (Kellner, 2004, p.
The characters are not misrepresented or flattened, and their unique needs are taken into account in their representations.

Disability Studies interrogates concepts of normalcy, and characters who have disabilities, who are in Schneider Award winning books resist being positioned as abnormal. Along with their friends they learn that everyone has impairments, even though they may be less culturally significant. This takes some of the negative cultural power from the experience of having an impairment in ways that the books celebrate. However, this change in attitude does not remove the physical impairment and certain things continue to be challenging, which is ignored in the books. Accepting oneself and one's limitations is a powerful experience but it is not actually a cure for disability or for others' attitudes. It is fair to expect equal treatment, but few of the characters do. This points to some element of the reality of disability, but it also presents disability as inherently problematic for those who have it. The characters are often surprised by being treated fairly, rather than resistant to negative treatment.

Even when the books reify binaries and identity categories, as Jimenez (2015) states, “for those of us whose life experience falls outside the norm, reading about characters that reject a homophobic view of the world can be a lifesaving act of rebellion, a push against a status quo that does not include us” (p. 409). The very term queer is the opposite of normalcy and there is a certain irony in those who are considered queer also desiring normalcy. Nonetheless, the desire to have equal status and have one's moral worth recognized leads to a quest for normalcy for many of the GLBT characters in Stonewall Award winning novels. This desire leads to denial of certain aspects of self, on the one hand, and embracing the oddnesses of others as well as oneself, on the other.
While characters in Stonewall award winning novels are not all white or middle class, those who are not middle class aspire to that status, either through Ari’s dreams of a home with an office in it, or through Carlos’s judgments about his own family. The ways in which Stonewall winners reify what is considered normal may be considered safe bets in cultures that do not value queer representation in children’s books, but like superhuman abilities in Coretta Scott King winners and assimilation in Pura Belpré winners, being otherwise normal does not shield queer people from violence or misrecognition.

Like in most of the other award-winning books, Newbery award winners consistently provide the message to their readers that their characters are normal. On the one hand, this is comforting for readers who may identify with the characters. On the other hand, this normalcy is in contrast to abnormal behaviors-- feminine boys, animals that act too much like people or too much like animals, and enjoying things that others don’t. But Flora learns in multiple ways, along with the reader, that trouble is also part of normalcy. In 2015, the Newbery manual included an additional page that had not been in past manuals, counseling members of the committee to consider values of inclusiveness, as well as their own biases, in their selection of books. In the three years prior to this addition, the winners focused on white protagonists and animals, but in the two years since it was added, the winners focused on people of color. This presents a welcome change as the authors of the two latter books are careful to present both challenges and strengths of their characters, never implying that their status as different from what is considered normal means they have less moral worth.
Normalcy is typically set against “the ‘deviant,’... the ‘pathological,’... the ‘unacceptable’” and what does not belong, “‘binding’ or bonding together all of Us who are ‘normal’ into one ‘imagined community’” while sending “into symbolic exile all of Them-- ‘the others’-- who are in some way different-- ‘beyond the pale’” (Hall, 1997, p. 258). Understanding that their difference is thought of as “a threat” or an irrelevant burden by those considered normal (Shannon, 1994, pp. 1-2), those who are considered different strive to show they are normal. They do this, either by claiming that who they are and always have been is normal, or by changing who they are to fit what is considered normal. For example, as Latinx characters in Pura Belpré learn English, the reader sees the privileging of American culture and English over Latinx cultures and Spanish (Valdes, 1997, p. 1093; Willis et al., 2008, p. 5). Nonetheless, most of the books show how attempts at appearing normal often fail, because of the power and prejudice held by those who are considered normal.

Normalcy is an imperfect goal for those who are considered different. “Normalized courses of action” “result in the silencing, exclusion, subordination, and exploitation” of entire groups of people who are not considered normal (Ng, 2003, p. 203), and there is a real danger of those things happening when normalcy is the goal. However, within the books, there are moments when the drive for normalcy breaks down, and imperfections and collaboration are held up. These moments of humor, connection, and understanding of everyone’s flaws, challenge assumptions of the importance of normalcy and dislodges entrenched binaries. They are small, beautiful attempts to destabilize assumptions and hierarchies about who is fully human and who deserves privileges and rights (Willis et al, 2008, p. 5; McLaren in Steinberg et al, 2006, p. 150).
When borders between what is normal and what is different break down, characters feel at ease, connected, and more powerful than when they are jockeying for position within a hierarchy. These moments of the breaking down of barriers present rare models for collaboration and coalition, disrupting the hierarchies that keep people disconnected and busy. The moments are clearly powerful for the protagonists and those around them, but their rarity makes them appear to be unusual treasures, rather than a promise of possibility. Even *This Day in June*, which is entirely made up of people reveling in their differences, is set on a single, special day, rather than being a model for every day behavior.

Pura Belpré Award winners seem to do the most effective work at deconstructing the power of normality, through their interrogation of the importance of borders. At the same time, Schneider winners (such as Ben’s use of the phrase “good ear” and Biddy’s wonder at graduating) and Stonewall winners (such as Gabe’s acceptance of the idea that dating a trans man is humorously absurd), are most prone to accepting the idea that the protagonists’ difference is deficient. Schneider and Stonewall award winners are also the awards that do not require that the authors be members of the group about and for whom the award was created. Additionally, unlike the other awards, the Schneider award is the only award not housed within a division, round table, or affiliate of the American Library that specifically takes a certain group’s interests and concerns into account.

The recent winners of the Coretta Scott King, Pura Belpré, Schneider, Stonewall, and Newbery represent the experience of difference as both valuable and challenging. Even though difference is not a focus of the Newbery awards, many winners provide general messages of acceptance. The awards criteria for the Coretta Scott King, Pura
Belpré, and Schneider awards specify authenticity and positive representations as important, while the Stonewall is more vague. The authentic representations allow glimpses into the ways that other people and their perceptions create the greatest barriers for those who are considered different, due to their attitudes, stereotypes, and the legal barriers that they set up, although interpersonal moments are most explicitly critiqued. They also provide a view into the ways that the characters are resilient and strong, but also rely on each other and on other friends and family for strength. Pura Belpré winners most directly interrogate the dangers of normalcy, as their characters face loss of identity and connection due to their attempts at normalcy, but all books claim that their characters deserve equal treatment to those who are considered different. The following chapter will consider how the values of difference and normalcy influence the treatment of those outside of the cultural group for and about whom each award is intended.
Chapter 5

Other Marginalized Groups in the Award-winning Books

In Chapter Four, I discussed how the Coretta Scott King, Pura Belpré, Schneider, Stonewall, and Newbery represent difference as challenging, but that those who are considered different are also strong, resilient, and supported. I also examined the complicated relationship to normalcy that is brought forward in these books, with a tension between whether to claim normalcy for one’s own group or to abandon normalcy as valuable. In this chapter, I will focus on how others’ difference is presented. While most of the awards claim that they are valuable for all readers, their language does not explicitly require positive representations of any other group. How do the winners of each award allow for the equal status and participatory parity of other marginalized groups?

In order to get the fullest picture of the American Library Association’s identity-specific awards and their place within the selective tradition of children’s literature, the focus cannot only be on the characters who fit into the group about whom the awards are for and about. Although that is important because it helps us understand how the awards are mending the lack of representation that they were introduced to mend, the status and opportunities for participation of those who are not the focus of the awards is just as important. It is important to take note of what the books do with characters whose identities are different from those about and for whom the awards are created. If pushing
others down is acceptable or even valued, what does that mean for the project of awarding children’s literature about those who are considered different?

Like in most other literature, including children’s literature, white characters’ race is not mentioned in winners of the Pura Belpré, Schneider, and Stonewall winners. When characters are African American or of any race other than white, their race is included in descriptions. Although normalized identities are often made invisible, every real person and every fictional character has experiences of racial, ethnic heritage, language, ability, sexuality and gender identity. However, people “do not participate in interactional relations as equals” (Ng, 2003, p. 205). With the focus of each award on one or two of those elements, the reality of other “[axes] of oppression” is sometimes overlooked, limiting the reader’s understanding of “unequal power relations” (May & Sleeter, 2010, p. 10). While Coretta Scott King award winning books focus primarily on their characters’ experience of racialized difference, Pura Belpré award winning books focus primarily on their characters’ experience of ethnic and language difference, Schneider award winning books focus on their characters’ experience of difference of ability, and Stonewall award winners focus on experiences of sexual and gender identity difference, all of these differences (and more) are found in all of the award winners.

A few of the characters are multiply marginalized, with a racial minority identity as well as an GLBT identity or disability, such as Quincy in Girls Like Us. While, because race, ethnicity, language, disability, sexuality, and gender are the salient identities for the Coretta Scott King, Pura Belpré, Schneider, and Stonewall awards, they are particularly interesting for this project, but they are not the only forms of difference that are used in these books to categorize characters, and the Newbery focuses on other
types of difference. Class, appearance, religion, age, and location are all ways that characters describe themselves and others in ways that invoke hierarchies. There are also a set of characters that are described as odd, in ways that clearly set the protagonists apart as better.

**Equal Status**

**Race & Ethnicity**

Friendships with African American characters are positive experiences for two white protagonists. While Ally struggles to fit in with her classmates due to her learning disability, she develops a strong friendship with Keisha, who is black and who patiently reminds her that disability is not the only form of difference (Mullaly, 2015, pp. 137-140). When Keisha is unfairly penalized for accidentally breaking a flower, Ally jumps to her side, breaking her own flowers in solidarity (pp. 72-74). Like Ally, Carson, the narrator in *The Porcupine of Truth* (Konigsburg, 2015), is white, but his friendship with Aisha, the black lesbian, in the story is much more complex than Ally’s friendship with Keisha, and Aisha’s character development is nearly as big of a part of the story as Carson’s. He interprets her racially before he learns that she is a lesbian (p. 40), and learns about the way her experiences are influenced both by her lesbianism and her race (pp. 72, 75, 113, 157-158, 195, 202-203). Her race is always a large part of her conscious identity in a way that Carson’s race is not, but she connects to Carson like he is family (p. 323). While Keisha and Aisha are important and likeable characters, they also function
as ways to highlight the protagonists’ growth, open mindedness, and moral character.

Their humanity is primarily relevant to how they advance the white protagonists’ arc, as a moment of interest convergence (Bell, 1992; McNair, 2008, p. 8; Hughes-Haskell et al, 2009), in that their humanity is tied into how they advance the white narrator’s arcs.

They are presented as having equal status, but they are also used by the author and the character, to move the white characters forward.

On the other hand, African American characters and Latinx characters see their struggles as intertwined and they develop friendships and work for each other’s rights (Engle, 2015, p. 156; Pinkney, 2012, p.231; Woodson, 2014, pp. 216, 256), which is an important element of LatCrit’s quest for universal social justice (Valdes, 1997, pp. 1093-1094). When she is in the South, Engle lives this sense of equality when she is unsure which water fountain to drink out of, deciding to “drink out of both” (2015, p. 66). Three Coretta Scott King winners explore the complicated, interwoven histories and heritages of Native Americans and African Americans (Nelson, 2011, pp. 47-48; Williams-Garcia, 2013, p. 256; Williams-Garcia, 2015, pp. 85, 90-92, 94-98, 102-103, 116-117, 182, 187, 241), as important parts of history and heritage, but the power dynamics are not addressed, with criticism, exoticism, and equality all mixed in how the heritage is understood.

**Language**

In Coretta Scott King winning *Brown Girl Dreaming*, Woodson thinks of her friend Maria’s Spanish “like a song/ I am learning to sing./ Mi amiga, Maria” (2014, p.
However, Pura Belpré present most of the excitement and celebration of language difference, as each of the characters have experienced the challenges of learning English, and deeply respect language variety. Celeste presents the multiple languages in Valparaíso as a strength (Agosín, 2014, p. 182) and wants to foster that belief in her American classmates (pp. 198-199), patiently teaching them Spanish (pp. 197-198).

Loving one’s grandmother’s “bumblebee” accent and Hebrew and German language (pp. 35, 37, 111, 128, 432), thinking of the words in the indigenous language of Mapudungún as magical (p. 75), and listening to the whispered words of the “banned tongues” of the provinces of Spain (Engle, 2015, pp. 178-179) are all represented.

Sexuality

Heterosexuality is assumed in all of the books, other than the Stonewall winners. However, there are two incidents that may hint at GLBT inclusion. The deep connection between Ben and Jamie has a romantic element, such as when Selznick tells the reader that “Ben saw something in Jamie’s glance, something that connected the two of them” (Selznick, 2011, p. 424). Selznick is an out queer man (Alexander, 2017, April 16), which may influence how he wrote or intended the friendship. In Fish in a Tree (Mullaly Hunt, 2015), Oliver’s bus driver could be read as gay because she likes things that are rainbow colored (p.131). Like Gabe, GLBT readers look for GLBT representation in places where it may not obviously be, both because it is rare and because it has historically been hidden and coded.
Religion

Religion is often a loaded topic, but moments in these books show how it can be presented neutrally. While the religion of the characters in the books is not always identified, all of the protagonists whose religion is mentioned are either Christian or agnostic about Christianity, with Celeste in *I Lived on Butterfly Hill* having both Christian and Jewish heritage. Sometimes religious difference is just represented by a Muslim or Jewish classmate with different cultural rules (Williams-Garcia, 2013, p. 93, 240) and particular wisdom (p. 234), while Mecca is seen as a place of hope (Woodson, 2014, p. 306). The faith of the Mapuche people is full of spirits, nature, and “wise women” (Agosín, 2014, pp. 255-256), and it is seen as comforting (p. 435), and Native American spirituality is idealized (Gantos, 2011, p. 279).

Multiculturalism

In some of the books, multiculturalism is portrayed as a celebration of all cultures, such as in a holiday concert (Mullaly Hunt 2015, p. 70), varied cultural artifacts found in a museum (Selznick, 2011, p. 407), a book translated into many languages, “even” Braille (Pinkney, 2012, p. 59), music from around the world in the plaza (Agosín, 2014, p. 420), using work name tags that span gendered, raced, and clearly fictional names (Cronn-Mills, 2012, pp. 122-123), a couple with names that sound like they are from different cultural backgrounds from each other allowing characters to couch surf in their home (Konigsberg, 2015, p. 231), and “Tai Chi done by many different kinds of bodies, people of infinite different colors and shapes” (Konigsberg, 2015, p. 236).
Some characters have explicitly intersectional identities that encompass more than one kind of marginalized experience, and identities that are deeper than those categories, such as Biddy who has a disability, is white, and is fat, and Quincy who has a disability and is mixed race, with dark skin (Giles, 2014, p. 21), Kim who is a Korean American immigrant who is poor (Agosín, 2014, p. 204), and Turk who is a gay “Jew who goes to church” (Konigsberg, 2015, p. 285). This kind of multicultural representation is “largely cosmetic and visual, displaying a diversity of rainbow-colored bodies rather than racially interactive groups and social relations” (Kellner, 2004, p. 69). Carlos even recognizes that this celebration of difference can be profitable, as openness to diversity allows for more customers (Wright, 2011, p. 77).

Multicultural diversity is also seen as a place of solidarity and strength (Agosín, 2014, p. 45, 225-226, 427), with people of all races work together for equality (Nelson, 2011, p. 95). Woodson is amazed when she realizes the depth of diverse history that brought her neighborhood and her self into being (Woodson, 2014, pp. 297-298). Dante loves the ethnic diversity of Chicago, including seeing many other Mexicans, and it makes him once again question his identity (Alire Sáenz, 2014, p. 174). After observing the deceptive dynamics of a dog park full of “all types” of people and dogs, where he learns that his snap judgments of people are not always correct (Konigsberg, 2015, pp. 287-293, 295), Carson celebrates the “crazy-ass, totally imperfect people” he loves (p. 314). Miss Volker is particularly interested in Eleanor Roosevelt’s humanizing support for the “common people” (Gantos, 2011, pp. 34, 194-195), and Nana tries to teach CJ that all people deserve respect, recognition, and welcome (de la Peña, 2015).
While a “multicultural paradigm” that “attempts to be everything for everyone and consequently becomes nothing for everyone” (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995, p. 62) is not the goal, it is important to find places in the books where the “founding binarisms and dependent hierarchies” of “the margins and centers of power” are displaced (McLaren in Steinberg, et al. 2006, p. 150). Group identities are constructed and fluid, and multicultural children’s literature can be part of a “dynamic process in which group identities are constituted and reconstituted” to push against injustice (Malone, 2000, pp. 78-79). When written about well, readers find transformative recognition and redistribution within the texts that welcome them and others, providing a model of possibility for equity, inclusion, and solidarity, honoring the equal moral worth of all parties (Fraser, 1995).

High Status

Race & Ethnicity

When whiteness and its privileges are unacknowledged, racism is preserved (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 27). In the words of most of the Schneider and Stonewall winners, as well as Dead End in Norvelt and Flora and Ulysses, most characters’ races are not mentioned and they are “White by default” (Jimenez, 2015, p. 418), “culture-free and normal” (Shannon, 1994, p. 1-2). On the other hand, within Coretta Scott King winners, white racial identity is named. Woodson’s Latina friend spends a summer in Schenectady with “rich white people” and they assume she is poor and try to give her
things (2014, pp. 242-243), believing themselves to be in binary opposition to those with brown skin (Hall, 1997, p. 243). When Vonetta is hospitalized, she is ignored by the white hospital employees, (Williams-Garcia, 2015, p. 262), and people who are white are not immediately trusted (Pinkney, 2012, p. 12; Williams-Garcia, 2015, pp. 118-119), because of the pervasive racism that the African American characters have experienced (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 9; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 7; Lynn & Adams, 2002, p. 88; Brooks, 2008, p. 38; McNair, 2008, p. 7).

**Sexuality**

Josh’s father and his brother both find value and strength in their heterosexuality (Alexander, 2014, pp. 19, 54), but for others, heterosexual male sexuality is presented as sometimes hostile and threatening (Medina, 2013, p. 194; Alire Sáenz, 2014, p. 16). Heterosexuality is often assumed in Pura Belpré winners, with gendered differences also assumed to be places of attraction (Medina, 2013, pp. 3-5, 19; Agosín, 2014, pp. 13, 420), rather than explicitly expanding ideas of possible sexuality (Crisp, 2011, p. 197), despite the fact that one winner has multiple GLBT characters and also won a Stonewall award.

**Gender**

For female characters, male characters are portrayed as threatening a cause of self-consciousness (Haskell, 2013, pp. 73-74), in charge of the world (Nelson, 2011, p. 69), too attached to their mothers (Medina, 2013, p. 202), and overly lustful (p. 25).
These female characters want male characters to not be “too fussy” (Medina, 2013, p. 128) or weak (Gantos, 2011, pp. 102, 165, 245), but protective instead (Wright, 2011, p. 127). Piddy even states, “you always feel safe with a guy packing a Glock,” referring to Lila’s police officer boyfriend (Medina, 2013, p. 128). While Engle often envies boys’ freedom (Engle, 2015, pp. 25, 76, 105), she also notices that “old women, little girls, and pretty ladies” have the luxury of seats on the guagua, while “men and boys” have to chase it down (the fate of older girls and women who are not pretty is not described) (p. 91).

Class

Ari is fascinated that Dante’s father has a home office (p. 8), and plentiful wealth is aspirational (Wright, 2011, pp. 28-30, 48, 61-62, 149; Giles, 2014, pp. 14-15, 29, 44, 88) or associated with cruelty (Mullaly Hunt, 2015, pp. 43, 61).

Religion

Some Jews are shown as interested in displacing others (Williams-Garcia, 2013, p. 140). Christians are portrayed both as transphobic (Cronn-Mills, 2012, p. 115) and homophobic (Konigsberg, 2015, pp. 9-10, 42-47), and as welcoming (p. 126) or gay and sex positive (p. 282-283), but they generally have power over the safety of GLBT people. Specifically, Mormons are portrayed as inhumanly clean (Konigsberg, 2015, p. 194),
potentially homophobic and racist, but also as unique individuals who may prove that assumption wrong (pp. 161, 172-173; 186-187), but Quakers are portrayed as somewhat less racist than other white people (Pinkney, 2012, p. 12).

Low Status

Race & Ethnicity

Unlike the equal status found in other books, and unlike her otherwise progressive values, the humanity of people of African descent who were enslaved at the time of America’s founding (during the 18th century) seems irrelevant to the otherwise progressive Miss Volker, who admires the way founders were able to put their differences about slave ownership to the side, “for it is the American way not to focus on differences, but on what we have in common: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” (Gantos, 2011, 213). This casual racism is normalized in the name of American unity (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 27), even though Miss Volker also tells some history of nationally notable and local African Americans (pp. 42, 287-288). In the introductory illustrated scene in *Flora & Ulysses: The Illustrated Adventures* (DiCamillo, 2013), we see a white older woman ignoring her African American husband while she is, oddly enough, eating crackers (p. 1).

For the African Americans in Delphine’s class, their new teacher’s Zambian heritage is surprising. Delphine describes him as having two accents, one that is “probably an African accent” and the other “like the queen of England’s” (Williams-
Garcia, 2013, p. 94). He is well-read and poised, but he mortifies his students by dancing a traditional Zambian dance at the school dance (p. 264). He holds a complex place for Delphine and her classmates (Hall, 1997, p. 243), appearing strikingly different from the African American people that they know.

Some characters’ recent European descent overshadows their whiteness somewhat, Piddy has multiple unpleasant interactions with Mrs. Boika, the “nasty Romanian lady downstairs” (Medina, 2013, p. 14). Engle is thoughtful about the difference between her Cuban mother’s “flowery” stories of home and her “Ukrainian-Jewish-American” grandmother’s brief statements about her own home, and decides that her grandmother’s experience of “escape” shortens the amount that she wants to say about her own life (Engle, 2015, p. 28-29). In keeping their Eastern European ethnic identities, they may not have fully made claim to the whiteness that is their property (Bell, 1992; McNair, 2008, p. 8; Hughes-Haskell et al, 2009). Dr. Meescham’s vague recent European heritage gives her nontraditional grammatical phrases, such as when she says, “this sofa is the sofa of my grandmother” (DiCamillo, 2013, p. 127), marking her more by language than race.

In Stonewall-winning Putting Makeup on the Fat Boy (Wright, 2011), Carlos is Latinx, describing his hair as “Puerto Rican–Dominican–Indian black” (p. 180). He does not name his cultural heritage often, but after he is beaten up, he sees himself in the mirror and decides he looks like he is in a “horror movie about tastefully dressed Hispanic high school monsters” (p. 219). The connection between monsters and his cultural heritage is troubling in relation to a history of connecting monsters and queerness in “depictions of alien ‘Otherness’” (Benshoff, 1997, p. 6). Carlos’s signature fashion
critiques extend to his mother, as he is grateful that she doesn’t dye her hair “red or bleach blonde like a lot of other Spanish women her age” (p. 66), separating himself and his fabulous confidence from people in his own community (Valdes, 1997, pp. 1093-1094).

Characters of more races, ethnicities, and heritages are important parts of these books, although they follow some stereotypes. Asian characters in the books include a smart, reserved model minority (Medina, 2014, pp. 5, 229), a friendly and useful ex-boyfriend (pp. 11-12), a shy girl who likes spicy food (Mullaly Hunt, 2015, pp. 48-50), a true friend whose voice, eyes and art are compared to birds (Agosín, 2014, p. 179-180, 208, 247-248, 258), and a harsh but caring restaurateur (Williams-Garcia, 2015, p. 204). Recent wars with Vietnam (Williams-Garcia, 2013, p. 118) and Japan (Gantos, 2011, pp. 3-6, 59, 86-87, 320-321, 323, 329) cause characters to view those countries with suspicion, although Miss Volker pushes back against negative treatment of Japanese people (Gantos, 2011, pp. 196, 280).

Native Americans make a few brief appearances in some of these award winning books, but they are always relegated to the past, sometimes even just represented by artifacts (Gantos, 2011, p. 15-17, 30, 89-90, 98, 133-134; Selznick, 2011, pp. 324-325; Engle, 2015; Konigsberg, 2015, p. 224). Jack is amused by a description of “the Hairy Ainus People” (Gantos, 2011, pp. 82-83), but he is also fascinated about the “native islanders” who helped John F. Kennedy and another sailor, even after they took the islanders’ supplies (p. 152). Gypsies are mentioned in casual derogatory ways by the Gaither family (Williams-Garcia, 2013, pp. 157, 233) and are portrayed as a nomadic reminder of the mysterious links between people by Engle (2015, p. 180).
Quincy is mixed race, and Biddy is curious about this (Giles, 2014, p. 33), wondering which “one of [her] folks was mix-up,” to Quincy’s annoyance (pp. 34-35). Big Ma is suspicious of Hirohito Woods, because she only hears his name and considers it an “ooga-mooga name” (Williams-Garcia, 2013, pp. 42-44), and the girls ineffectively try to calm her by describing his mixed Japanese and black heritage. While often “matter out of place” or blurring of “symbolic boundaries” is unsettling (Hall, 1997, p. 236-237), in the case of mixed race characters in these books, only Big Ma’s response is one of discomfort with the concept of racial mixing.

Language

While Latinx characters’ language in Pura Belpré winners sets them apart as different, Spanish marks difference in other books as well. Carlos’ family is Latinx but he only hears “a Spanish accent” from his sister when she is at work at a mall taqueria (Wright, 2011, p. 35). Carson reads a “caramel-skinned girl”’s accent as “Latina” and he finds her flirtatious and attractive (Konigsberg, 2015, pp. 225-226). This fascination with Spanish, while positive, is not complex and may more exoticify those who speak Spanish, rather than connect the struggles of the marginalized groups (Valdes, 1997, pp. 1093-1094). Other forms of language difference are included in the books as well. Delphine has difficulty in speaking with someone who primarily speaks Chinese (Williams-Garcia, 2013, p. 205). Piddy seems to find a deficit in the fact that her school holds classes for people learning English (Medina, 2013, p. 117).
Dis/abilities

Possibly more than any of the awards, Newbery winners regularly use disability to set people apart as different. In Newbery winners, weakness in general is presented as a problem (DiCamillo, 2013, pp. 58, 180). Physical impairments are horrifying and amusing (Gantos, 2011, pp. 23, 40, 134, 139, 206; Alexander, 2014, p. 61) or a cause for concern (Applegate, 2012, pp. 30, 52, 63; Alexander, 2014, pp. 48-49, 226), although they do not preclude characters from romance (Gantos, 2011, pp. 30-31, 223). In *Last Stop on Market Street*, the blind man on the bus is presented as exceptionally perceptive, polite, and a reminder of magic (de la Peña, 2015).

In winners of every award, mental illness is also used as an insult (Gantos, 2011, pp. 239, 297; Nelson, 2011, p. 23; Haskell, 2013, p. 269; Williams-Garcia, 2015, p. 178; Mullaly Hunt 2015, p. 154; Alire Sáenz, 2014, pp. 47, 51, 327; Wright, 2011, p. 6, 12, 15, 29) or threat (Gantos, 2011, pp. 21, 44, 197, 204, 269-270, 334; DiCamillo, 2013,p. 80; Haskell, 2013, p. 250; Alexander, 2014, pp. 138-139; Williams-Garcia, 2015, pp. 232, 236, 240, 263; Alire Sáenz, 2014, pp. 46, 135, 327; Medina, 2013, p. 194; Wright, 2011, p. 179; Konigsberg, 2015, pp. 17-18; 34). In *We Lived on Butterfly Hill*, mental illness is almost a compliment, as Cristóbal says that their mutual craziness, which he links to “unshakable faith,” is why he and Celeste are friends, and when Celeste’s father explains that the reason he trusted an old man while he was lost at sea, was the man’s “craziness” in contrast to the deliberate lies of so many others (Agosín, 2014, pp. 321, 361).
Sexuality

These award-winning books contain depictions of sexuality, both GLBT and straight. All outright sexuality is viewed with suspicion by other characters, although heterosexuality is much more common and expected, and “Gender and sexuality, therefore, operate as regulatory norms” under “patriarchal domination” (Miller, 2015, p. 39). Girls who have had sex (Giles, 2014, p. 37) or who seem interested in sex (Medina, 2013, pp. 17, 193, 248; Wright, 2011, p. 23) are considered indecent by peers, parents, and offspring. For Carlos, his female friend’s heterosexual infatuations are amusing (Wright, 2011, p. 17), but his own crush’s heterosexuality is frustrating (Wright, 2011, pp. 85-87; 203-204). As teenage boys, Carlos’s (Wright, 2011, pp. 85-87) and Carson’s (Konigsberg, 2015, p. 258) virginity embarrass them.

Outside of Stonewall award winners, the only direct allusion to GLBT identity outside of come twice in casual homophobia in Dead End in Norvelt, once when Bunny tells Jack Gantos that he had been “as sick as a sissy” (Gantos, 2011, p. 218) and once when Jack Gantos is sure that the romance in a “love story” he is hearing is not going to be between the two male characters he’d been introduced to (pp. 228-229). The slur “homo” is used in Yaqui Delgado Wants to Kick Your Ass, and Piddy gets in trouble when she gets caught trying to remove it when she sees it, although the slur seems to be less related to sexuality than to low status (Medina, 2013, p. 98).
Gender

Female characters are described as thoughtful (Alire Sáenz, 2014, p. 232), interested in fashion (Cronn-Mills, 2012, p. 13), and domestically inclined (Konigsberg, 2015, p. 17), and male characters also want female characters to be flawless (Konigsberg, 2015, p. 129). Some female characters feel that women should be apolitical and quiet, while others feel that they should have political power (Williams-Garcia, 2013, pp. 185-186), and some female characters are bookish while others are tomboys (Woodson, 2014, p. 211). While Jack Gantos has a crush on the beautiful Mertie-Jo (Gantos, 2011, p. 254), he admires Bunny’s toughness (p. 62) and Miss Volker admires Amelia Earhart’s bravery (pp. 42-43). Being gendered female also represents a threat, which Lupita’s father states, saying that girls “shouldn’t go away to college” because of “predators” (Garcia McCall, 2011, p. 199). Expectations for femininity go against the interests that of female protagonists (Garcia McCall, 2011, pp. 59, 73-77, 148; Medina, 2013, p. 17; Agosín, 2014, p. 40; Engle, 2015, pp. 76-77, 105) who are frustrated by the limits and double standards that go with these gendered expectations (Garcia McCall, 2011, pp. 63-64; Medina, 2013, pp. 4-5; Agosín, 2014, pp. 13, 90-91, 105, 128; Engle, 2015, p. 91).

Delphine is aware of the potentially divisive nature of an emphasis on gendered difference, when her teacher splits the class into gendered teams, thinking how the Black Panthers had warned them about the strategy of “divide and conquer… separat[ing] the people and make one side think they are different or better than the other,” but is confused because of her belief that “girls were better than boys” (Williams-Garcia, 2013, p. 101-102). Her classmate, Danny continues to tease another boy, Ellis by calling him
“Elly May,” a name that misgenders him, throughout the book (p. 166). Delphine does not critique this teasing or defend Ellis’s identity or her own gender, but she prefers Ellis to Danny.

Binary gender differences are described and assumed to be normal in what children wish for (Lean, 2013, p. 18), height differences for dancing (Williams-Garcia, 2013, p. 262), names (Woodson, 2014, pp. 6-7), couple’s negotiations about ordering food (Wright, 2011, pp. 34-35), and styles of friendship (Konigsberg, 2015, p. 182). Even pets’ genders are seen as important (Alire Sáenz, 2014, p. 189) and gendered language is important to Jack Gantos (Gantos, 2011, p. 174). Gender differences are normalized, primarily within a binary structure, but a queer reading can “destabilize” those categories (Crisp, 2011, p. 197), opening up multiple and varied gendered possibilities for readers.

Other than Gabe’s transgender experience, some deliberate gender transgressions are described. In Brown Girl Dreaming, Woodson’s father wants to name her Jack after himself, but her mother pushes back, thinking that it would cause people to assume they were “crazy” and names her Jacqueline (2014, p. 6-7). Other transgressions include when Lupita’s siblings also dress their baby brother “like a girl” to be funny and rebellious (Garcia McCall, 2011, p. 43), when a woman is described as nearly indistinguishable from a “guy in drag” (Medina, 2013, p. 62), when a man escapes Chile dressed as a nun and meets a woman (who becomes his love interest) dressed as a priest (Agosín, 2014, pp. 374, 448), when Carlos wears boots meant for girls (Wright, 2011, pp. 27, 30), Gabe’s interpretation of the town’s founder’s statue as genderless (Cronn-Mills, 2012, p. 68), his description of Prince (p. 183), Paige’s ability to burp “Jingle Bells” (p.
17), and the cruel, homophobic barista looking “kind of funny in an apron” (Konigsberg, 2015, p. 40). These gender transgressions are often exotified and or humorous, reinforcing “regulatory norms” (Miller, 2015, p. 39) rather than opening them up (Crisp, 2011, p. 197; Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2013, p. 146). Most sexual and gender differences are seen as either humorous or disturbing transgressions (Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2013, p. 146; Miller, 2015, pp. 38-39), while heterosexuality is strongly valued (Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2013, pp. 143, 146).

**Class**

Although the struggles for freedom and economic equality are a part of the histories that Nelson (2011) and Pinkney (2012) address, sorting people by class is not a concern of Coretta Scott King winners. In Pura Belpré winner, *Yaqui Delgado Wants to Kick Your Ass* (Medina, 2013), Piddy analyzes the differences between her friend Mitzi’s new neighborhood, her own (pp. 10, 141-142, 155-156), and the “shit hole” neighborhood Yaqui lives in (pp. 75, 164), differentiating herself from her classmates who receive free breakfast (p. 27). Ari and Dante (Alire Sáenz, 2014) also contemplate class as Dante’s mother worries about his refusal to wear shoes, and how that might make him look poor, a Mexican stereotype (pp. 45).

Often poor characters provide an opportunity for the protagonists to contemplate their own “luck” or class privilege (Garcia McCall, 2011, p. 145; Mullaly Hunt, 2015, pp. 92-93, 178-180; Agosín, 2014, pp. 15-16, 19, 25-26, 28, 31-33, 439; Engle, 2015, pp. 35, 71, 93; Lean, 2013, pp. 41, 48, 110-112, 115-116), or to be generous (Haskell, 2013, pp.
Homelessness is shown as threatening (Konigsberg, 2015, p. 218), and homeless people function as set pieces to instill fear and uneasiness (Konigsberg, 2015, pp. 217-218, 280; Selznick, 2011, pp. 242-243).

Appearance

Attractiveness is seen as dangerous (Giles, 2014, p. 121; Wright, 2011, p. 73) and valuable (Wright, 2011, pp. 73, 108; Konigsberg, 2015, p. 3, 279). Exceptional appearances are noted as comical (Konigsberg, 2015, pp. 2, 12; Cronn-Mills, 2012, pp. 24, 63; Wright, 2011, pp. 40, 148, 154, 187), threatening (Gantos, 2011, pp. 49, 166; DiCamillo, 2013, p. 79), or the subject of concern (Medina, 2013, pp. 47, 230; Konigsberg, 2015, p. 34-35; 60-61). Fatness is generally considered a problem (Gantos, 2011, p. 255; DiCamillo, 2013, pp. 45, 188; Mullaly Hunt, 2015, pp. 36, 103-104; Wright, 2011, pp. 4-5, 11, 13, 15, 17-19, 26, 37, 84, 180; Giles, 2014, pp. 7-10, 45; Garcia McCall, 2011, pp. 62-63), while cultural conceptions of weight cause distress for Engle when her sick Cuban relative compliments her on how chubby she is, hurting her feelings (Engle, 2015, p. 100). Shortness is striking (Gantos, 2011, pp. 217, 245; Lean, 2013, p. 161), funny (Wright, 2011, p. 27), and not supposed to be attractive (Cronn-Mills, 2012, p. 182). William Spiver describes his shortness as a response to “excessive trauma” (DiCamillo, 2013, p. 59).
Age

Age adds an element of difference that makes characters feel suspicious of each other. Young children are seen as awkward, immature (Engle, 2015, pp. 32-33), and tactless (Wright, 2011, pp. 143-144). Children who are older are seen as more responsible (Williams-Garcia, 2013, p. 135; Woodson, 2014, p. 259), and supposed to be less emotional than younger children (Medina, 2013, p. 184), but teenagers are not seen as fully people (Alire Sáenz, 2014, p. 8). Adults are full of deceptive unknowns and power (Mullaly Hunt 2015, pp. 2, 161; Giles, 2014, p. 18, 38; Woodson, 2014, p. 259; Alire Sáenz, 2014, pp. 10, 354-355), and they are expected to be dull (Alire Sáenz, 2014, p. 8-9; Cronn-Mills, 2012, p. 93). Older adults seem fragile (Gantos, 2011, pp. 100, 131, 199, 285; DiCamillo, 2013, p. 14; Alexander, 2014, p. 79), very mortal (Giles, 2014, p. 207), and losing their ability to think clearly (Gantos, 2011, p. 218; Agosín, 2014, p. 31). Even an old pelican is portrayed as “lazy” and “lagging a bit behind” (Agosín, 2014, p. 22).

Religion

Muslims are portrayed as invisible, anonymous foes (Haskell, 2013, p. 7), while Jews are portrayed as the victims of the Nazis (Gantos, 2011, p. 279; Nelson, 2011, p. 74) or those who escaped (Agosín, 2015, p. 415), or just holders of odd, unbelievable names (Konigsberg, 2015, pp. 283-284). “Heathen” is a codeword for having a lack of manners (Williams-Garcia, 2013, p. 32).
Location

Even a person’s location can mark them as different. Urban fascination with the country (Mullaly Hunt 2015, p. 16) and vice versa (Konigsberg, 2015, p. 34-35), the relative safety of the country compared to the city (Konigsberg, 2015, p. 120), and the suburbs versus the city (Medina, 2013, pp. 153, 187, 211; Wright, 2011, pp. 132, 142, 144-145, 147, 160) are addressed. Jack’s mother (Gantos, 2011, p. 298) and Miss Volker (p. 262) are proud of Norvelt’s openness and bravery. The American South and the American North (Williams-Garcia, 2013, pp. 26-27; Woodson, 2014, pp. 194-195) are shown to be different, and the whiteness of the Montana is commented on (Konigsberg, 2015, pp. 37-38). Vietnam during the Vietnam war (Williams-Garcia, 2013, p. 86; Alire Sáenz, 2014, p. 346-347), rural Mexico (Garcia McCall, 2011, pp. 187-189), unique places within Chile (Agosín, 2014, p. 168-169), connections between Korea and Chile (pp. 211, 218-219), and Nazi Austria (p. 138) all shape characters, while Jack Gantos’s dad suspects Russians (Gantos, 2011, pp. 55, 281-282). The fictional Blundermeeecen is portrayed as a dangerous place full of “dark secrets, unmarked graves, terrible curses” and “trolls” (DiCamillo, 2013, p. 135). Even a certain chair with an obscene word on it is a unique location that affects how people experience difference (Medina, 2013, p. 32). Characters most often celebrate the places they are from, while feeling suspicious about other places and the people from those places.
Oddness

The value of normalcy within the books is also seen in the treatment of characters who are just considered odd. Oddness is described as a problem (Gantos, 2011, pp. 43-44, 46, 160; DiCamillo, 2013, pp. 55, 60, 171), that could lead to loneliness (DiCamillo, 2013, pp. 124-126, 173; Mullaly Hunt, 2015, pp. 1-2; 99-100; 258), intensive instruction in normal behavior (Mullaly Hunt, 2015 pp. 51, 70-71, 77), disciplinary action (Lean, 2013, pp. 13, 30, 88-89; Medina, 2013, pp. 187, 225), and unpopularity (Medina, 2013, pp. 5, 100-101, 138; Engle, 2015, p. 132). Gabe does not like that his hair resembles that of the “kid who sat under the flag and picked his nose” (Cronn-Mills, 2012, p. 13). At school, Carson has conversations with himself, but he makes sure to tell the reader that he isn’t “a freak or anything“ (Konigsberg, 2015, p. 10), but much later in the book, he feels at home in San Francisco, describing it as “Freakville” that has been waiting for him (p. 244).

Multiculturalism

Living with difference is sometimes seen as threatening by some characters, considering the “encounters with the ideas and habits of others” an intrusion (Lemert, 1995, p. x) or an “imposition” (Shannon, 1994, p. 1-2). Quincy is concerned by the possibility of living with roommates who she thinks of as very different from her (Giles, 2014, p. 65). New York’s colorful diversity is portrayed as striking and overwhelming (Selznick, 2011, pp. 264-265). Woodson’s grandmother warns her and her siblings from playing with their neighbors, who have had different life experiences from theirs.
(Woodson, 2014, pp. 66-67), and Flora finds the variety of people in her life a bit absurd at times (DiCamillo, 2013, p. 189). However, each of those automatic responses are eventually shown to be false, as the characters develop familiarity with the environments or people that they initially considered different.

Analysis

The world is diverse, varied, and multicultural. Children’s literature cannot ignore this fact or treat it as an imposition. An African American’s world includes people who are Latinx, disabled, and GLBT, both within and outside African American communities. All of these groups are surrounded by and influenced by people from each of the other groups, as well as a myriad of other groups whose constructed statuses shift depending on context. Every person’s identity is created, in part, by the intersection of the groups to whom they belong, and the layers of status that entails. Every person, regardless of intersecting axes of identities, needs full participation rights within the larger society (Fraser, 2001, p. 25).

The selective tradition of children’s literature has conspicuously ignored each of African Americans, Latinx people, people with disabilities, and GLBT people, treating them as though they were invisible or so inferior as to be unmentionable. These award-winning books respond to the crisis of representation and recognition, and they are considered to be models of representation for their own groups. They cannot ethically or realistically avoid including other marginalized groups. This inclusion is not necessarily done well.
These award-winning books accurately and realistically present differences in status as they are currently constructed. For example, white people do have power over Latinx people who come into their homes, and the use of this power is shaped by their opinions, as when Maria visits Schenectady in *Brown Girl Dreaming*, and straight boys are often expected to assert their heterosexuality and masculinity through gendered teasing, as Danny does in *P.S. Be Eleven*. The characters and stories resist some of these constructions, but they also reify, uphold, and recreate some of them. Representing participatory parity where it does not exist would be dishonest, but denying it, through stereotyped, flat and mocking representations is unjust.

Even for those who are considered different, marking others as different allows groups “to close ranks, shore up culture and to stigmatize and expel anything which is defined as impure, abnormal” (Hall, 1997, p. 237). It seems as though in order to assert the humanity of those who they know are considered different, the books reduce others to a few exaggerated and simplified traits, as though placing boundaries, so that they are not linked as similarly undesirable or defective (Hall, 1997, p. 258-259). These stereotypical and flat presentations are so ubiquitous in media for children and adults that they are almost unnoticeable.

However, their effect is to present the identities for and about whom the awards are intended as superior, even just superficially or temporarily, to another group. Who that group is does not seem to be particularly important, although people with disabilities, particularly mental illness, are primarily those who are mocked and marginalized most frequently. Disability is often ascribed to those who are considered different, including African Americans, Latinx people, and GLBT people, “to justify the practices of
exclusion and neglect that are still tacitly understood as a legitimate corollary of the disability status” (Ferguson & Nusbaum, 2012, p. 74). Whether the effect or intention is to keep down people with disabilities in particular, disability is seen as a valid reason to keep someone down. People with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to this kind of reasoning, because disability is seen as limiting a person’s ability to contribute to society. A disability accusation is an accusation of burden or worthlessness. Pushing oneself above someone with a disability is then the most obvious attempt to prove one’s worth and value. Missing in all of this jostling for position is the possibility of equal status that does not marginalize in its attempt to be considered normal or worthy of equal rights of participation.

Currently, the American Library Association’s response to the crisis, in creating awards that represent specific groups, has only gone so far to remedy the values and assumptions of its historic selective tradition. As part of a new selective tradition of award winning books that are held up as ideally pedagogical representations of difference, Coretta Scott King, Pura Belpré, Schneider, and Stonewall award winners have a responsibility to promote literature that is socially just, addressing and interrogating structural inequalities and working to end them. The books have the power of being a common part of classroom libraries and what is recommended as quality representations. By perpetuating unjust representations of other groups, the awards effectively abuse this power. The gains that may be incurred from a representation of other groups as inferior and deserving lower status are only temporary, because it continues a hierarchical orientation through which their own groups will also be viewed unfairly and harshly.
The books wrestle with power and status issues but rarely get it right. They are attempts at constructing a world that projects equity, but they fall short. As much as they may push back against unjust misrecognition, these books are written and prized within a culture that has upheld white, European American, nondisabled, straight people (particularly men) as the ideal for a very long time. Questioning these cultural values continue to happen within the very culture that is critiqued.

Resistance and questioning cannot stop, though. Each moment of resistance and each question is a step toward a mature moral reckoning with the status quo. While representations will continue to fail in small and large ways that are uncomfortable for those who benefit from the status quo and those who are harmed by it, the only way to move past it and through it is to acknowledge it and to know it. This cannot be done through valorizing one community at the expense of another, burdening new groups with excessive difference or failing to acknowledge them. Instead, awards must strive to honor books that acknowledge the hierarchies that exist, but question their construction, moving toward solidarity instead.
In this study, I wanted to learn about how difference is presented to children in award-winning books in which difference is the focus. First, I looked at the criteria for the Coretta Scott King, Pura Belpré, Schneider, Stonewall, and Newbery awards, to see what they explicitly valued and wanted communicated about difference. Then I examined 24 books, five winners each, of, to find all of their references to the experience of difference and its illuminating opposite, normalcy, first by looking at how the groups about and for whom the books experience difference in the books, and then how those characters and the books themselves treat those that they consider different. In this chapter, I will review my findings, and present what they mean for the American Library Association, its awards committees, teacher educators, teachers and librarians, and researchers.

The study took two and a half years to complete, but it came on the heels of a shorter earlier study. In 2014, as I was contemplating what to write my comprehensive exams about, Jacqui Reid-Walsh suggested I pick a few awards and read five recent winners of each, and see what I found. I decided to look at the Coretta Scott King, Pura Belpré, Schneider, and Stonewall awards for how they represent difference. At that time, I wasn’t concerned about being consistent with intended age or type of book, thinking that a broader mix would give me a deeper understanding of how difference was
represented. I found that difference was a strong theme in the books, but was most interested in how each group represented the other award-focused identities.

As I began this dissertation, I refined my questions and also decided to focus on only one age group for the books I looked at, so that I could focus more accurately on what difference meant, rather than what the ages meant. I also decided to incorporate the Newbery award to help me understand if the way it represented difference was comparable to the way the other awards represented difference. I had also begun my work with a disability studies focus, working with the thoughtful and sharply discerning Disability Studies in Education scholar, Kathleen Collins. As my work moved out of that realm and more into Children’s Literature, the wise, honest, and patient Vivian Yenika-Agbaw took me under her wing, and with the endlessly available, serious but light-hearted help from Pat Shannon (as well as the early advice and guidance from the knowledgeable and generous Wanda Knight and Steven Herb), I created, lived, and completed this project.

In order to do that, I read the criteria for all of the awards while researching their history, and I read all 24 books and the reviews for all of them. After an initial reading of all of these, I coded their references to difference, based on themes that I honed to most completely answer my questions, and subthemes that arose from the data. I read more and wrote about the criteria, the awards and their history, and the books, examining critical theorists along the way, to effectively understand the conceptions of difference that the awards communicated. I revised and revised and read and thought and revised again. And in the meantime, I taught wonderful, quirky, and dynamic elementary schoolers as much as I could about reading, and I tried to explain to my now-five-year-old...
old, who wants to write a dissertation someday, how important she and our family is, even though I couldn’t play with her as much as she or I wanted.

The criteria for the Coretta Scott King, Pura Belpré, Schneider, Stonewall, and Newbery awards all require excellence. The Coretta Scott King, Pura Belpré, and Schneider all also require authenticity and positive representations, while the Stonewall has very vague terms and the Newbery criteria does not specify anything about identity or authenticity. The Coretta Scott King, Pura Belpré, and Schneider criteria all claim that their awards are universally beneficial, but only the Pura Belpré and Newbery criteria explicitly address cultural diversity beyond the group about and for whom the award is intended.

The books that have won these awards present difference as challenging. However, this is most often due to the responses of others. Difference is also presented as a positive thing, as even the challenges build strength and characters build coalition with others. Characters who are considered different are presented as unique, but the books also work to show that their characters are normal and deserve normal treatment. However, the intrinsic value of normalcy is questionable and sometimes questioned, particularly in Pura Belpré winners.

The representations of identities who are not the focus of the awards often mirror and perpetuate the status of those groups in real life, as well. This is done directly and indirectly, through who is noticed, talked about, joked about, and presented positively. Some moments do hold up the possibility of equality and coalition between groups, and some groups are even given higher status than the groups about and for whom the awards are created. However, most references to other groups condemn them to lower status.
This is done most often to people with disabilities, as disability is consistently considered an acceptable insult.

As examples of the selective tradition of children's literature (Williams, 1977; Taxel, 1981) which is created through what is published, promoted, and prized, awards that recognize difference have a particular responsibility in creating a more equitable society. The expectation and claim is that the winners of the awards are the highest quality, most accurate and authentic representations of the experience about which they are written. However, while the American Library Association has consistently vocally promoted middle class ideals of democracy and opportunity through education, its work has occurred within a culture that idealized white European American men over all others (Lemert, 2004). Even as the American Library Association has been forced to reckon with the inequitable nature of its selective tradition, this reckoning has only gone so far.

The criteria of the Coretta Scott King, Pura Belpré, Schneider, and Stonewall awards claim that they are of the same high quality as the Newbery, but that they are also accurate, authentic representations of the experiences of the people about and for whom they are intended. The claim of high quality is important, because it does not discount the capabilities of these groups, but it is also dangerous because the standards that define high quality are crafted outside of the groups about and for whom the awards are created. In other words, the standards of high quality may not be the appropriate standards for judging all authentic, accurate texts. In claiming normalcy because of its promises of equal status, the awards do not also claim the equal moral worth that puts them in coalition and solidarity with other marginalized groups (Fraser, 1995).
The books that win the awards present the difficulties of difference that arise through the perceptions of others and the realities of separation and disconnection, and the strengths such as resilience and diverse community that come out of being considered different, although these strengths are sometimes dangerously portrayed as superhuman. At the same time, they have an uneasy but powerful relation to the concept of normalcy, as the books typically present their characters as normal. The books' most powerful moments are when they deconstruct the concept of normalcy by forging connections across borders and by reminding the reader that it is normal to be flawed, even questioning what flaws mean.

By their very nature, the awards do not trouble the categories of identity that they focus on. Critical Race Theory, LatCrit, Disability Studies, and Queer Theory all interrogate the construction of identities of race, ethnicity, ability, and sexuality, and the ways that these very constructions create hierarchies. By existing for and relying on those identities, the awards do not "[disturb] the underlying framework that generates them" (Fraser, 1995, p. 82). However, the Newbery Award has not yet shown that it is able to adequately recognize the experiences and identities that come from these artificial categories, so these identity-focused awards are used to fill that gap.

The identity-focused award-winning books do not ignore other groups, but those representations are of varying quality. While the books present some marginalized groups as deserving equal status and characters sometimes resist the lower status of some groups, at other times, lower status is actively perpetuated, through insults and humor. This works as an attempt to gain higher status, but perpetuates the hierarchies that also devalue them (Crenshaw, 1989; May & Sleeter, 2010).
Ideally, award winning books would not so avidly and singularly seek recognition for the groups about and for whom they are created (Fraser, 1995; 2001). The recognition that the awards seek tries to repair the damage of misrecognition and nonrecognition found previously within the selective tradition. However, without disrupting the value systems that consider their groups deficient while also seeking similarly accurate and positive representations of other groups, the same systems continue. Stereotypes continue (Hall, 1997a), and clamoring for position (Crenshaw, 1989) is justified. By upholding these values, racism's assumptions continue to seem natural (Ladson-Billings, 1998), injustice for and prejudice toward Latinx people is justified (Valdes, 1997), and disability (Ferguson & Nusbaum, 2012) and GLBT identity (Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2013) are considered abnormal.

Representing the experiences of being considered different as challenging is important because the challenges are real and they have real effects. Ignoring those pieces of the experience of difference paint an overly rosy picture, and promote misconceptions about the work that those who are considered different must do in order to have their moral worth recognized. At the same time, relying too much on the negative experiences of being considered different creates low opinions as well, as those who are considered different become objects of pity and their agency is questioned. The negative experiences can become seen as the natural and right consequences of difference.

Representing the strengths that come from being considered different is also important. People who are considered different are resilient, whole, complex people with agency and the ability to grow and change. They live within communities that thrive and
support them. All of these things must be represented, and they are too often ignored. At the same time, only considering strengths can discount the struggles of real people who are considered different. Also, excessively superhuman characters provide unaccessible role models and can perpetuate the devaluing of people who cannot live up to superhuman expectations.

Thus, a balance between strengths and challenges is vital. This does not necessarily have to happen in all books, or in all books that are prized. Some stories are about struggle and some are about strength. But an over-reliance on either element misrepresents the experience and creates flat, inaccurate conceptions of people who are considered different and their experiences. Within the books that are prized, the struggles that characters experience are often presented as though they are obstacles to rightful claims to normalcy and equal status, while the representations of strength are also bids to be considered normal and to be allowed equal status. However, moral worth and rights of participation do not rely on adequate normalcy.

With my experience as a queer kid who grew up to become a teacher of kids of color, all of whom have been diagnosed with disabilities, and most of whom come from immigrant families, it makes sense that I would be interested in what difference means and how it works. But, considering that I was a white kid in honors classes who grew into a man, it’s possible that I could have missed the questions, let alone their answers, completely. Every step of the way, this project has had me wondering about who I am, what I value, and if my values of inclusion, equity, and equality can ever be found in a children’s book. The books that I’ve read for this study are all beautiful in so many ways. They have all delighted me at some point. But they’ve also all disappointed me at
some point as well, as people get misrepresented, mocked, or left out. Even though I love them, I worry about how to share them with the perceptive kids of color at my school and the even younger white kid in my home.

**Implications**

**ALA**

For the American Library Association, there is room in for more intersectional representation within the awards. The criteria for award winning books can reflect that need more than it already does, building on the “diversity and inclusion” statement found in the Newbery and Pura Belpré manuals. It does not need to be a list of restrictive guidelines that may fundamentally only result in guilty tokenized representation. Instead, it can be a call to reflection, to break out of historical models of what is considered excellent and universal.

Mirrors and windows in their books do not just point at one person. People who are considered different are found in the figurative margins of books, in small parts and joking language, and they will find themselves, no matter how small the slice of themselves there is. There is room for so many more celebratory, interesting, and deep representations of all kinds of people, in ways that do not push others down.

It is possible that some committees need to be restructured. Currently, the awards that honor the strongest representations of difference that do not rely on stereotypes or an overvaluing of normalcy, are housed within organizations that explicitly value the needs
and interests of those groups. As the American Library Association attempts to honor our increasingly diverse society, they must be conscious of the real and diverse needs of all readers and patrons, and not attempt to shape those readers and patrons into preconceived notions of an educated, valuable, normal public.

There have been calls for diverse books and recognition of diverse books within the American Library Association and outside of it. With opinions about children’s literature that continue to be highly regarded, there is no need for the American Library Association, its members, or its awards, to continue what has always been. Early American Library Association members used their positions to change the conception of children’s literature. There is no reason that current American Library Association members need to continue the status quo.

Committees

The committees can be restructured to ensure that those who are part of the committees have a strong commitment to the needs, interests, and values of the group about and for whom the awards are intended. This can be accomplished through housing each of the committees round tables, divisions, and affiliates that are explicitly committed to those groups. The American Library Association can also provide education for committee members about the needs, interests, and values of other marginalized groups as well, to ensure those representations are equitable as well. It is important that the books that are prized continue to show the challenges of being considered different. That can lead to empathy in a reader who has a different experience or a sense of connection to
a reader who has shared that experience. That cannot be all that is represented however. Children cannot see representations of themselves or others as only sorrowful and difficult. That could lead them to despair or to believe that those challenges are rightfully earned.

It is important that the books that are prized continue to show the strengths that people who are considered different have and where those strengths come from. It can promote joy, hope, and respect in readers who share experiences and those who don’t. Nonetheless, characters should not be presented as overly strong or resilient, because it does not present a full, accurate picture. Not only that, there is a danger that, for groups who are still facing challenges, presenting their lives as only full of strength, it minimizes all that it took to get there, and may add to a belief that they are superhumanly capable of withstanding painful experiences without feeling pain. Within group variety and support within community are valuable strengths that come up again and again in most of the award winners, and that is important. While real disabled and GLBT people do and must rely on people outside of their communities for support, they often belong to strong, vibrant communities, and the strength of those communities have not been adequately represented in the award winners I examined.

Normalcy, is, of course where it gets most complicated. Even as these books present difference, they are published, marketed, and read in a culture that has historically and continues to value the normalcy of white, European American, nondisabled, heterosexuality. As much as the books are expected to provide unique stories of difference, that difference may often just be seen as a flavor on top of a story that should otherwise be normal. As the awards go to books that the committees consider authentic
and excellent literature, it is important when they push back against the importance of normalcy. However, perhaps the committees feel they must be cautious of presenting their own groups as deviant or less valuable. The cost of that caution though is a continuation of books that devalue others.

Being marginalized does not make someone immune to being oppressive. While award winning books appear to be objectively excellent, the committees that choose them and the criteria with which they choose them are full of values. Many are explicitly laid out, but others are not even known to the people who have them. Our cultural value of normalcy and suspicion of difference is hard to shake. But if it is consciously held, recognized, and interrogated, it may be possible to effectively respect and honor groups and individuals who have been misrepresented and misunderstood.

Teachers, Teacher Educators, and Librarians

Teacher educators need to remind their pre-service teachers that book choice is complex. Awards are useful tools, but excellence is not neutral. Struggle, strength, and normalcy are all part of the experience of being considered different, and teacher educators can guide their students in looking for those elements in texts. As teacher educators and pre-service teachers experience texts together, they can consider how their representations of difference and normalcy will affect the real people who they teach.

These books are important. They tell important stories about struggle, resilience, and meaning. However, like any book, they do not stand alone. They cannot and should not provide a canned message about difference or diversity or a particular identity. They
are much more complex, and as this study shows, their complexities can lead to questions about the meaning of difference and identity. These books, in their richness, deserve to be used as more than a manual or guide for understanding an entire group of people. That is not really what they are for.

Literature provides windows and mirrors to readers. It can bring knowledge, recognition, or entertainment. At the same time, reading literature requires a critical eye. Without that, readers can swallow ideologies without knowing it. Although the identity-focused awards consciously represent interests and concerns of specific marginalized groups, they were founded and continue within the same cultures that for have for so long idealized white, European American, nondisabled, straight masculinity. They are written, judged, and taught within these cultures.

Teachers can help their students question, rewrite, and retell stories. What and who is missing from each text? Why? Who is misrepresented? If the students wrote the stories, how would they be different? What if they told it from the perspective of a white, European American, nondisabled male? In what ways would that perspective match the published text? If it was told be a character who is marginalized within the story, what would change? Which perspective is more in line with that of the published text?

Students can rewrite the stories from different perspectives to understand how difference is constructed within the texts.

Most importantly, though, this study is a reminder that teachers cannot rely solely on a book's status as an award winner to gauge its quality as a representation of a group that has been considered different. In valuing texts that adhere to certain standards of quality that have been honed in privileged contexts, other stories get left behind. In
judging texts that are suggested by publishers, other stories may not get considered. In having committees made up of people who may or may not share the concerns of the population about and for whom the texts are written, what is most important to those communities may get left behind. And even if the texts are somehow perfect, each award winner is just one of many stories published in a year. Using it as the only text about a group of people for that year necessarily misrepresents that group, as the text comes to represent more than a single story but an entire group.

Researchers

Previous research has taken on particular awards and particular identities. That important work has shed light on how the selective tradition has worked for those groups. This work does not replace that work, and more of that particular, fine-grained work should be done. This project, on the other hand, expands that work, not to produce something universal, but to see what is being prized about representations of African Americans, Latinx people, people with disabilities, and GLBT people, and what are valued representations of difference.

As researchers, there is work to be done on how these books are used and understood. Who is reading them and why? Who is ignoring them and why? Are they being used pedagogically, and to what effect? Are people taking issue with who is being represented and how they are being represented? What books were not prized and why?

It is important that a project such as this does not homogenize difference. African Americans are different from Latinx people who are different from people with
disabilities who are different from GLBT people. Even if a person holds more than one of those identities, their experience will be unique. All that those groups share is that they have been considered different, and for the purposes of my study, they have particularly been considered so different that the Newbery award ignored them for so long that they needed to create their own award. The experience of being considered different is powerful and it can create commonalities in people who have shared it. However, each person is unique, and the power dynamics for each group is different. It is not for me to say if any of the groups has it easier or harder than the other. But they have it different from each other.

Moving forward, research on books that do allow for the kind of participatory parity that is missing in many of the award winners should be done. How are those books different than the ones that win awards and how are they received? Do other flaws in representation or quality come up? Also, this study opens up doors to research into the relative promises and practices of recommended book lists, instead of the singular awards. Of course, there also needs to be research into how teachers and students are using these books. How do they harness their promises of equitable presentation and how do they resist the places where the books fall short?

Children's literature presents a clear view into what a culture thinks is important to pass on to those it considers most impressionable and vulnerable. It is important to consider what ideologies and values they present, and these may not always be clear. Being considered different is often challenging, but difference is not a bad thing. The challenges of being considered different often come from other people rather than the difference itself. Difference provides unique perspectives and insights which are
necessary for growth and renewal. But the challenges of difference can make normalcy seem tempting, and books do a lot to hold normalcy out as valuable. It appears to be a state of earned equal status, where one's moral worth is appropriately valued.

Books that have won the Coretta Scott King, Pura Belpré, Schneider, Stonewall, and Newbery award winners hold high status as quality children’s literature, and the Coretta Scott King, Pura Belpré, Schneider, and Stonewall awards are used pedagogically as representations of difference. The awards do many good things in accurately and authentically presenting the challenges and strengths and opportunities of difference. Very rarely, the characters see ways in which they and those around them have equal moral worth, but in general, the quest for normalcy is shown to be the way to achieve equal status.

This study challenges us to question that valuing of normalcy. People have equal moral worth and that is not earned through adequate normalcy. It is dangerous when books imply that characters should be more normal in order to earn their rightful place in society. This is particularly dangerous when the books are presented as highly valuable representations of an experience of of a group that has been considered different. Instead of assuming their intrinsic value as a human being, readers may leave the book wanting to change who they are in order to live up to values that may actually run counter to their wellbeing. While it is important to see one's challenges and strengths reflected in books, it does psychic damage to imply that those are not good enough. Although they should be challenged in ways that help them grow, young readers should be able to enter books safely, without fear that they will be diminished or insulted. This study cautions those who prize books to consider if the books that they prize truly recognize the equal moral
worth of all of the characters and people, or whether there are standards of normalcy that characters must live up to in order to have their moral worth recognized.
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