

## **More Than Just Pink vs. Blue: A Content Analysis of Gender Messages in Children's Activity Books**

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Research on gender messages in both print and audiovisual media has shown that girls and women are often underrepresented and portrayed in stereotypical ways (Hamilton et al., 2006; Matthes et al., 2016), especially in children's media. A previous study of five children's activity books by D'Addio et al. (2021) found a high level of stereotypically gendered content, including the color schemes, activity types, and portrayals of characters. The current study expands on that research, analyzing 20 children's activity books targeted specifically to girls (8 books), boys (4 books), or a more general audience (8 books). Books were selected based on publication date (2000-2020), a minimum of 50 activities of different types, and a target demographic of 6-12 years of age. Using the activity as the unit of analysis (e.g., word searches, sudoku, image matching, tips, coloring), a total of 3051 activities were analyzed by trained pairs of coders to explore the themes and character portrayals. The 22 themes analyzed reflected stark gender stereotypes: books aimed at boys were much more likely to feature sports, violence, cars and transportation, construction, snakes, spiders, aliens, and dinosaurs; books aimed at girls were significantly more likely to focus on physical appearance and fashion, friendship, romance, health and self-esteem, magic and dreams, astrology, royalty, dance, and cooking. Both the boy and gender-neutral books primarily featured male characters (often with distorted body shapes) or animals, while the books targeted to girls primarily featured female characters, including humans, mermaids, and fairies.