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Ilona Poole

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Book Choices of Girls During the Transition to Middle School: Empowerment Through Reading

Ilona Poole

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this project was to fill a research gap on the reading interest of early adolescent girls and to reveal whether the books these students are reading feature strong female leads. The literature review suggests that the transition to middle school is often a challenging and critical time for children, particularly for females. It also reveals the importance of book reading and relatable and strong girl characters to guide female students. These students can learn from the actions of the protagonist through character education. Based on this information, an online pilot survey was distributed to 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>-grade students from Arkansas and Texas. Analysis of the responses revealed while authors are featuring more multifaceted female characters that has historically been the case, there are still numerous inequities among male and female characters. Additionally, early adolescent female readers may potentially be consuming themes that are not to be made center their own lives. The results indicate the need for further expansion on the topic of research and for a system to be in place to ensure early adolescent females have access to books highlighting strong women.

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## Introduction

The transition to middle school is a critical time for early adolescents. It is the first transition to a new school that students are likely to remember later in life. During this time early adolescents are also experiencing numerous physical and social changes. For example, research conducted by Seidman, Allen, Aber, Mitchell, & Feinman (1994) demonstrated students who report negative experiences of transitioning to middle school also reveal having lower self-esteem, demonstrate a lack in coursework preparation, and a lower grade-point average. These associations are seen across students of all ethnicities, genders, and socioeconomic statuses. Additionally, this transition to middle school is critical in establishing a work ethic for academic achievement. Clearly, it is important to understand the role models students have to serve as examples as they work through these challenges; at its heart, that is what this study aims to examine.

It is important to first examine the significance of having a positive transition to middle school on various aspects of the child's social and academic life. In this process, girls face more challenges regarding issues of self-confidence throughout their lives and especially during the middle school years. Adolescent girls face challenges of insecurity due to unrealistic expectations for physical appearance. These early adolescent girls begin to believe that their worth is determined by their appearance which has major consequences on their self-esteem. Moreover, during this time girls start to label themselves and are given labels by their peers based on their personalities and interests. These labels have an association with determining a girl's levels of enthusiasm and ability to read. Therefore, despite the large gains for female empowerment, only certain girls are receiving the opportunities for academic success and encouragement from their educators.

Furthermore, books have a powerful impact on children's development. In particular, the book characters provide models and schemas for behavior. This is the idea of teaching children good qualities and traits through story characters. These book characters are almost as influential as real people on children (Almerico, 2014). Therefore, the books early adolescent girls are reading can serve as a guide to overcome, empower, and encourage.

However, it is important to understand the underrepresentation that exists for females characters in literature. This underrepresentation has been present throughout most of history and is remains substantial today. Not only is there a lack of female main characters in literature, but there is also a smaller pool of books that feature strong female leads. This lack of female role models in literature results in girls being unable to have seen themselves represented in an empowered way. Additionally, they have a limited amount of strong female characters who serve as role models, and potentially not every girl can relate to the strong female role models that are in books.

This project aims to fill the research gaps on this topic and to examine the types of books and characters that 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>-grade girls are reading about before these students transition to middle school. This will reveal whether the books these girls are reading about feature strong female leads that would serve as potential role models and teach through character education.

## **Review of Literature**

### **Transition to Middle School**

The transition to middle school is marked by the adjustments students must make to become more autonomous and endure new social challenges. This can be seen by the formation of new peer groups, interpersonal changes, and academic success. This is likely the first transition to a school that students will remember and henceforth will carry with them for the rest

of their life. A study conducted by Seidman, Allen, Aber, Mitchell, & Feinman (1994) showed an association with students who report negative experiences of transitioning to middle school with lower self-esteem, class preparation, and grade-point average. Therefore, it is significant that having a positive experience during this transition is influential in setting a student up for academic success. It is also important to note that Seidman, Allen, Aber, Mitchell, & Feinman (1994) found this association between students of all ethnicities, genders, and socioeconomic statuses. Additionally, work by Véronneau and Dishion (2011) suggests that this transition to middle school is critical in establishing a work ethic for academic achievement.

**Female Self-confidence.** Girls face more challenges regarding issues of self-confidence compared to boys. Early adolescent girls begin to become aware of beauty standards around their transition to middle school. Cribb and Hasse (2016) describe the additional challenges adolescent girls face due to unrealistic expectations for physical appearance and how school environments can give rise to these feelings of insecurities for girls. These early adolescent girls in turn begin to believe that their worth is determined by their appearance which has major consequences on their self-esteem. Cribb and Hasse (2016) found that girls that attended a single-sex school were more likely to have higher levels of self-esteem because they do not internalize as much as girls at co-ed schools. However, other inevitable changes begin occurring during early adolescence as well. These changes can involve physical developments and skin impurities that can influence any individual's self-confidence. A study conducted by Izydorczyk and Sitnik-Warchulska (2018) demonstrated the association between appearance standards and eating disorders. This study detailed that early adolescent girls are reporting significantly higher averages of risk factors for eating disorders than older age groups. Izydorczyk and Sitnik-Warchulska examined different categories and their association with developing an eating disorder. One category in



particular, the body dissatisfaction category, measured on a scale of 0 to 12, illustrated that early adolescent girls showed a mean of 9.87 compared to their 1.85, 2.20, and 2.78 older counterparts. Also, making comparisons is a natural behavior that can cause jealousy to ensue or for feelings of self-doubt to occur. Therefore, because of the harsh beauty standards forced upon girls and natural human behaviors females deal with greater issues of self-confidence than their male counterparts.

Moreover, a qualitative study by Bettis and Roe (2008) found an association between girls self-labeling and their academic success and enthusiasm for reading. For example, a girl may think of herself as timid and therefore would label herself as a *shy girl*. The authors observed girls' participation in reading discussion groups, their time allocated for reading, and their enthusiasm for reading in response to these labels. These labels also have a hierarchical with the ultimate title being an *alpha girl* (Kindlon, 2006). These are the girls who were given this label by Harvard psychologist, Dan Kindlon in 2006. Kindlon describes these girls as the epitome of breaking down social barriers for women. However, they are also praised for having similar characteristics as boys. Girls who were deemed as *non-alpha girls* showed an association for not participating in discussion groups or were assigned the role of the writer of the group because it is viewed as a more feminine task (Kindlon, 2006). Additionally, these *non-alpha girls* described having an interest in reading but lacking the personal time to do so. Also, the material assigned in school often dampened these girls' enthusiasm for reading. Therefore, Bettis and Roe (2008) suggest that despite the large gains for female empowerment only the girls who are deemed as *alpha girls* are receiving the opportunities for academic success and encouragement from their educators. Moreover, Bettis and Roe (2008) describe how these *non-alpha girls* begin to become overlooked by their educators and do not receive the same

encouragement as the *alpha girls* and boys. This means that there a large portion of girls who lose their enthusiasm for reading and don't feel seen by their teachers, perpetuating this systematic cycle of inequality.

**Female Representation in Literature.** As previously mentioned, only certain girls are receiving encouragement to continue their passions of reading. However, an additional issue exists: these girls may not find characters to relate to in literature. Hamilton, Anderson, Broaddus, and Young (2006) while exploring 200 of the top selling children's books in 2001 along with other Caldecott award-winning books from a 7-year sample discovered that almost twice as many males appeared in the titles and as main characters compared to females. Additionally, Crisp, Knezek, Quinn, Bingham, Girardeau, & Starks (2016) when researching multiple early childhood classes found within 691 books, 195 (28.2%) featured leading female/ciswoman characters and 370 (53.5%) that contained male/cisman leading characters. The other 126 books (18.2%) were viewed as ungendered. This is significant to understand because the inequality amongst genders further perpetuates the idea that one is superior to the other:

For some young children, the classroom library provides them with their first repeated exposures to a literary canon: In their teacher's books, they will be looking for images of themselves and those they love; they will be learning how to make sense of their lives and experiences, the lives and experiences of others, and the world in which they live, (Crisp, Knezek, Quinn, Bingham, Girardeau, & Starks, 2016, p. 30).

**Influence of Literature.** Female representation in children's literature is important to consider, because books have a powerful impact on children's development. In particular, the book characters provide models and schemas for behavior. Almerico (2014) describes the movement of character education through literature. This is the idea of teaching children good qualities and

traits through story characters. These book characters have a “profound influence on them (children), almost as strong of an impact as that of real people they know and meet” (Almerico, 2014, p. 3). This character education is intentional and deliberate to demonstrate to students desirable and noble traits. However, as previously mentioned there is a great disparity amongst male and female main characters. This begins to present an issue of having a limited amount of female characters for early adolescent girls to view as role models. Johnson (1997) found that when interviewing adolescent girls about the books they have read were acknowledging the traits deemed more feminine and while they also admired the character’s bravery or strength, but were less likely to acknowledge similar traits in themselves. Additionally, these books were chosen for the girls to read and do not demonstrate the reading interest of their girls. Moreover, a more recent study conducted by Peterson and Lach (2006) shows that, while over time the number of books featuring females participating in stereotypical feminine activities has diminished, this decrease is not statistically meaningful. This suggests that these stereotypes are still being engrained in children and are influencing their cognitive development. Additionally, there are no in place systems to ensure that early adolescent girls are reading books that are relatable and highlight a strong female lead.

In short, if girls are not interested in what they are reading and are underrepresented in literature, than what is there to inspire them to continue reading? More research is needed to help answer the question of what girls making the transition to middle school are actually reading.

### **Methods**

To find out what early adolescent girls are reading about and if those stories they are reading feature strong female leads, research was conducted utilizing survey data collection methods. These data from the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>-grade female students reveal the reading interests of

students before entering into middle school – very often in their final year of elementary school. Moreover, the survey seeks to discover whether the books participants are reading feature strong female characters that can serve as role models and guides for their behavior education.

The pilot survey (see Appendix A) was specifically designed for this study. It is split up into three sections that include general book questions, questions about girl main characters, and questions about girl characters in general. These sections are essential in determining the influence, representation, and quality of characters that these students enjoy reading about, which is particularly critical given the trends of underrepresentation of strong female characters and main characters.

### **Sample Population**

The populations surveyed consists of self-selected students from two convenience-sampled elementary schools. Fifteen are 4th-grade female public school students at Holcomb Elementary in Fayetteville, Arkansas. Eight are 5th-grade female students from Austin, Texas that attend St. Elmo Elementary. As discussed above, these students are starting the process of navigating the transition from elementary to middle school while enduring numerous physiological changes. The surveyed students also attend the oldest grade in their respective elementary schools. It is significant to have data from female students in different locations and grades because both schools will show information on the reading interest of female students and whether these students have strong female characters to serve as guides before entering and enduring new challenges in middle school. Moreover, the two locations will provide a larger sample size of participants with more diverse experiences. These particular populations were chosen because the elementary schools are known to the author and provided convenient populations to sample.

### **Procedure**

To better understand what early adolescent girls are reading and if those books feature strong female leads, the survey was administered to 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>-grade female students in public schools. The first step for administering this survey was to create the questions. This process entailed collecting information about what the difference is between female characters and female main characters. This was done through research on relevant sources. From there information was collected about what qualities strong female characters possess. This was necessary in order to determine if these female students are reading books with female characters - in particular, books that feature strong female leads. Additionally, this process revealed what early adolescent girls are reading about, and whether there is specific reading terminology that needs to be used. As a result, a glossary was created to help the students if they are unfamiliar with any of the terms in the questionnaire. Finally, the draft survey was taken by two volunteer children known to the author, in order to identify difficult terms and questions and ensure that the survey was age-appropriate and comprehensive.

Once the survey was finished and parent consent forms were drafted, a project proposal was submitted to IRB via Streamlyne. Once IRB approval was achieved, invitations to participate were sent to public school librarians around Northwest Arkansas and Central Texas. In Arkansas the oldest grade in elementary schools is 4<sup>th</sup>-grade, whereas in Texas the oldest is 5<sup>th</sup>-grade. This invitation to participate was also accompanied by a letter to the administration about the survey. After collecting school participation responses, parent consent forms were distributed to Holcomb and St. Elmo elementary schools, and their 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>-grade female students took them home for both their parents and themselves to potentially sign. Then the students brought the signed consent forms back to school, where the forms were collected the

next week. After collecting the names of the consenting 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>-grade female students from both schools, the librarians began administering the online survey. From there the data was interpreted into significant findings were drawn.

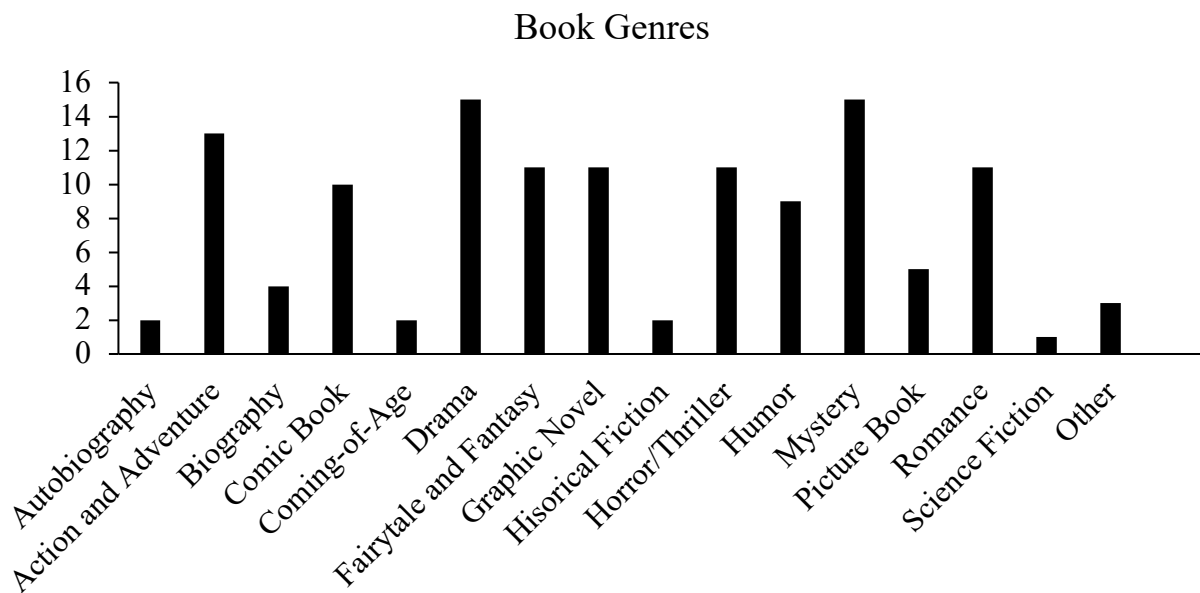
**Main Findings**

**Reading Interest of Female Students.**

The female students indicated a variety of interest regarding the different genres of literature that they enjoy reading. The three most popular included drama and mystery with 15 responses followed by the action and adventure category with 13 (see Figure 1). Additionally, the favorite book titles of 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>-grade students can be seen in Appendix B.

**Figure 1**

*Book Genres*



**Gender of Favorite Character.** Of particular interest was a question concerning the gender of the female students favorite book character. After inputting the data from Qualtrics into SPSS it was found that 12 students said their favorite book character was female and 11 stated their

favorite book character was male (See Table 2). It may be surprising that only one response separated these choices, despite the fact that only female students were surveyed. It is also important to note that the option of other existed in the survey, but no student selected that answer.

**Table 1**

*Favorite Main Characters Gender*

	Frequency	Percent
Male	11	47.8%
Female	12	52.2%

**Love Interest.** Another area of interest is regarding love interest and the influence the love interest have on the main character. According to the survey, 13 female students have read a book that involves a love interest (see Table 3). This is significant because the majority of students have been introduced to the idea of love. This potentially means, when considering character education, that a student might be influenced to esteem or even center their own life around romance.

**Table 2**

*Number of Students Reading a Book Involving a Love Interest*

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	13	56.5%
Unsure	4	17.4%
No	5	21.7%
Missing Response	1	4.3%

**Beliefs, Goals, and Hobbies.** These features provide depth and meaning to characters, therefore making female characters more multifaceted. From the data collected, which can be seen on

Table 4, 9 students indicated that any female character they have ever read about did have their own beliefs. Additionally, 10 stated they have read a book where a female character had their own goals. Eleven students indicated that they have read a book where a female character has their own hobbies. It is important to note that age-appropriate examples for each of these features were provided in the survey. This information is significant because it shows that the female characters students are reading about are multiple dimensional. However, it is important to note that 9 students indicated that they have read a book where a female character has been captured or killed (see Table 5). This is important to note because the authors are removing the female character from the story line or potentially continuing the narrative that women are in stories to play damsels in distress.

**Table 3***Female Character Having Their Own Beliefs, Goals, and Hobbies*

	Beliefs		Goals		Hobbies	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Yes	9	39.1%	10	43.5%	11	47.8%
Unsure	3	13%	3	13%	3	13%
No	4	17.4%	3	13%	1	4.3%
Missing Response	7	30.4%	7	30.4%	8	34.8%

**Table 4***Number of Students Who Read a Book Where a Girl is Capture or Killed*

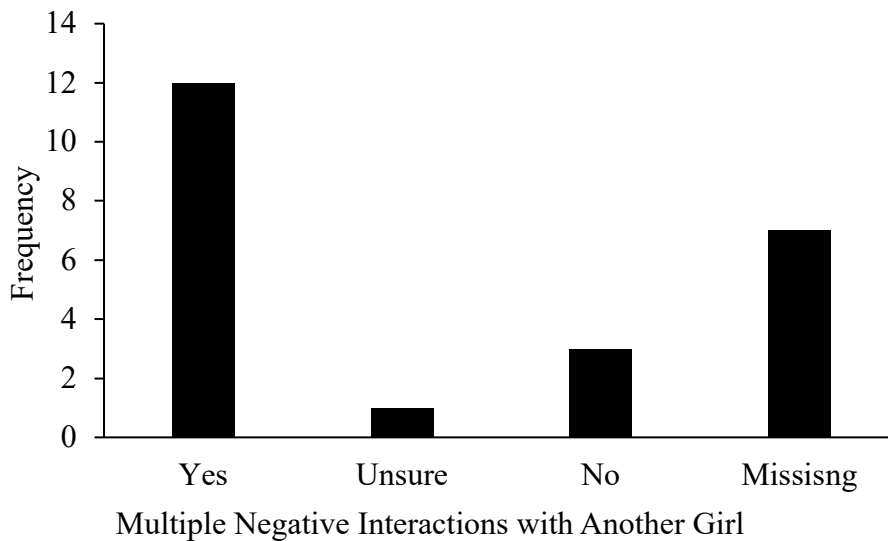
	Frequency	Percent
Yes	9	39.1%
Unsure	2	8.7%
No	5	21.7%
Missing Response	7	30.4%



**Girl Character Interactions.** Twelve students indicated that they have read a book where multiple negative interactions have occurred (see Figure 2). This indicates that the majority of participants read about where women are pinned against one another. It can potentially be interpreted that authors continually are portraying women as malicious and catty. In addition, 6 survey participants, the majority, indicated that they have read a book where girl characters have been in direct competition with one another (see Table 5). This is significant information because this indicates that female students may not be reading books that highlight traits of strong female women.

**Figure 2**

*Multiple Negative Interactions with Another Girl*



**Table 5**

*In Competition with Another Girl*

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	6	26.1%
Unsure	5	21.7%

No	5	21.7%
Missing	7	30.4%

### **Limitations and Implications for Future Research**

#### **Survey.**

An important note to make about this project is that the survey was a pilot tool. Therefore, future revisions or changes can be implemented to provide a more specific look into the reading interest of early adolescent students. Moreover, it is also important to recognize the limited number of responses that were obtained in this survey, therefore restricting the generalizability of these findings. Having more responses in future studies will be beneficial when performing analysis and allow for more robust and statistically significant results.

**Student Reporting.** This project relied on student self-report. Therefore, generalizations made about love interest and other topics explored took for granted student understanding of terms and questions presented to them. Care was taken to phrase all questions such that young children could decode and comprehend the content, and students were additionally provided with a list of defined terms. However, future research could strengthen these results by confirming students' responses with additional analysis of book content and characters.

**Socioeconomic Status.** While this project was targeted towards public school students who have a wide range of socioeconomic status, it was not specifically examined in this research. This should be addressed in future research on this topic. Specific questions could be added to the survey or additional research could occur to find the socioeconomic status of participating student's families, or even at the school level. This would be significant in determining if there is a difference in access to book the feature strong female leads and what books girls are interested in reading depending on the socioeconomic status of the school.

**Different Types of Schools.** This project was specifically aimed at the oldest students attending public schools, due to private and charter schools having access to different resources and the ability to create a wider variety of curriculum. However, in order to find what 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>-grade girls are reading about and if those book feature strong female leads future, future researchers could expand upon the sample population. This additionally could provide a wider range of socioeconomic status represented in the study.

**Demographics.** This pilot survey examined 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>-grade female students which are often the oldest students in the elementary schools. However, no question in the survey specifically asked for the grade level of the student. In the future to provide comparison or further analysis researchers can ask questions to determine more about the demographics of the students. This information could be beneficial to determining regional differences across student populations.

### **Proposal for Registered Student Organization**

#### **Purpose of the Organization.**

Given these findings from the pilot survey, and in order to ensure that 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>-grade female students are reading books that feature strong female leads and have a role model before entering into middle school, a registered student organization (RSO) could be created. Specifically, the woman at the University of Arkansas could serve as mentors and reading buddies to young girls about to transition into middle school. This would ensure that students are reading age-appropriate books that highlight strong female woman, while additionally providing these young girls with a university student mentor. This RSO would be influential to help prepare girls though character education and having conversations to prepare for a significant time of transition. Moreover, this organization could be founded at any higher education institution across the United States in the future.

**Registered Student Organizations at the University of Arkansas.** At the University of Arkansas according to the Division of Student Affairs office of student activities. (n.d.), a new RSO can be established at any time after meeting the criteria below. The rest of this section will elaborate on the potential plans for this organization per the guidelines provided by the University.

The RSO must first provide a statement of purpose and a constitution for the organization. In Appendix C, sections A and B section contain the proposed purpose statement and a sample constitution that RSO can use to establish this program at the University of Arkansas.

Next, a University employee must be secured to serve as an advisor for this group. This person can be a faculty or staff member, but not a graduate student. I would propose that if this organization were to be established by another honors student for their creative honors project that their honors mentor could serve as the advisor. Moreover, at any point in time an advisor can be changed.

The next step in the RSO registration process would be to have more than 6 members for the group. In order to get the word out about this organization there are many avenues to pursue. According to the website that provides instructions for new RSO's, one could email the Arkansas union reservation to host a recruiting meeting. Moreover, up to three posters can be hung around the Union after receiving permission a week prior from room A665 in the Arkansas Union. Additionally, an email could be sent out through the RSO weekly events email highlighting this organization. Another idea to recruit members would be to reach out the members of Greek life or professors and ask to come speak at their chapter events or classes to promote joining this RSO.

After having an advisor and students join the RSO the next step is to create a profile on HogSync, which is the management tool used to monitor RSO's. Also at this time a new RSO pre-registration form must be completed. This form must be completed by two officers in order to schedule an orientation for the group. These officers must maintain at least a 2.25 cumulative GPA, be enrolled full-time to their respective programs, not be on disciplinary or academic integrity probation, and complete 2 officer orientations. It is recommended that the officers completing this form would be the president and the treasurer of this organization.

Additionally, each Registered Student Organization must have a president and a treasurer of the group. Plus, like previously mentioned, they should have a faculty or staff advisor from the University and be comprised solely as students who attend the University of Arkansas. These individual must also follow the Code of Student Life and adhere to RSO Compliance and Non-Discriminatory Policy. Finally, this RSO must be sure to re-register every year during the appropriate registration window.

### **Conclusion**

From the literature review, it can be seen that the transition to middle school is a time of numerous interpersonal and physiological changes for early adolescent girls. Also, experiencing a positive transition to middle school is important regarding setting the student up for academic success. Being academically successful is also influenced by the label the female student gives herself. This is important to recognize due to the differences in challenges and experiences noted by Kindlon (2006). It is also the time where girls start internalizing beauty standards and make conscious decisions about their appearance and can experience feelings of insecurity, body dissatisfaction, and lack of self-confidence. Moreover, there is a significant lack in female

representation in literature which means that young girls had a limited amount of strong female characters to serve as guides and to learn from through character education.

Furthermore, after interpreting the data collected from the survey it can be seen students have a female character to serve as a role model through the critical time of transitioning to middle school. While these characters can be relatable and multifaceted as seen with their beliefs, goals, and hobbies, there are still areas of concern that warrant further research. For instance, it is concerning that a high percentage of students have read books in which a female character is captured or killed. Another area of concern is regarding the theme of love. This idea is highly involved in books and is a favorite genre of many early adolescent females more. However, the influence of romance on early adolescents could provide misleading priorities to early adolescent female. These are all significant areas to consider because early adolescent girls are experiencing challenges during this time of transition. Moreover, existing research suggests that while books highlighting strong female characters have increased, this change is not statistically significant.

The reading interest of young female students and research suggests the need for a reading program geared towards early adolescent females, the creation of more literature featuring strong female leads, and additional research conducted about this topic in order to gain further insight.

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## Appendix A

### Survey

IMPORTANT NOTE: Please read through each of the questions carefully. You may notice some words are bolded in order to make a distinction. Please see the definitions below if any terms are confusing. These terms can also be found at the bottom of the page for you to reference while taking the survey.

Autobiography- The story of a persons' life written by that person who lived through it.

Beliefs- Values that an individual believes to be true.

Biography- The story of a persons' life written by someone else

Character- Someone who is talked about or plays a part in the story multiple times.

Coming-of-Age- A type of story that focuses on the development and growth of the main character.

Goal- An achievement that an individual tries to accomplish.

Hobbies- Activities that a person enjoys doing in their free time.

Historical Fiction- A story that takes place in a different time or place from the past. The story can include historical people or events. However, the author includes original additions to the plot or characters to make a new story.

Main Character- the lead character whom the story follows and their adventures.

Quest- A long adventure to complete a specific mission or goal.

Book Section:

1. Think about all the books you have ever read. What are your top three favorite books?
  - Book 1:
  - Book 2:
  - Book 3:
2. Does one of your favorite books include a girl as the **main character**?
  - Yes
  - Unsure
  - No
3. Does one of your favorite books involve a group of friends that has a girl in the group?
  - Yes
  - Unsure
  - No
4. Think of all the books you have ever read. Who is a girl book character that you admire (look up to)?
5. What book or book series is that girl book character from?
6. Think of all the books you have ever read. Who is your favorite book **main character**?
7. What is the gender of your favorite **main character**?
  - Male
  - Female
  - Other
8. What types of books do you enjoy reading? (select all the types of books you enjoy reading)
  - Action and Adventure

- Comic Book
  - Coming-of-Age
  - Drama
  - Fairytale/ Fantasy
  - Graphic Novel
  - Historical Fiction
  - Horror/ Thriller
  - Picture Book
  - Romance
  - Science Fiction
  - Mystery
  - Autobiography
  - Biography
  - Humor
  - Other
9. If you selected "other" in the previous section please fill in the blank with the type of book(s) you enjoy reading.

Girl Main Character Section:

10. Think of all the books you have read. Have you read a book with a girl **main character** who goes on a quest?
- Yes
  - Unsure
  - No

11. If you have read a book with a girl **main character**, does the story involve a love interest?

- Yes
- Unsure
- No

12. If you have read a book with a girl **main character**, does she have traits that are realistic strengths? Some examples of these traits may be leadership skills, creativity, or kindness.

- Yes
- Unsure
- No

13. If you have read a book with a girl **main character**, do they have traits that are realistic weaknesses? Some examples of these traits may be fear, lack of confidence, or trouble saying, “no.”

- Yes
- Unsure
- No

14. If you have read a book with a girl **main character**, does she directly confront the villain, the person making their life difficult, in the story?

- Yes
- Unsure
- No

Girl Character Section:

15. If you have read a book with a girl character, does she actively try to change her destiny?

For example, Sally's family has decided she will be a potato farmer for her entire life, but Sally loves to sing. In order to prove to her parents that she can make it in show biz. She leaves home to compete on a national singing competition.

- Yes
- Unsure
- No

16. If you have read a book with a girl character, does she have her own beliefs? An example of a belief is: Treat everyone with kindness.

- Yes
- Unsure
- No

17. If you have read a book with a girl character, does she have her own goals? An example of a goal is: to make the varsity basketball team.

- Yes
- Unsure
- No

18. If you have read a book with a girl character, does she have hobbies? An example of a hobby is: painting, traveling, or singing.

- Yes
- Unsure
- No

19. If you have read a book with a girl character, does her personality change throughout the story?

- Yes
- Unsure
- No

20. If you have read a book with a girl character that includes a love interest, does she make decisions that aren't involving by her love life?

- Yes
- Unsure
- No

21. If you have read a book with a girl character, does the story include her getting captured or killed?

- Yes
- Unsure
- No

22. If you have read a book with a girl character, does multiple negative interactions with another girl happen in the story?

- Yes
- Unsure
- No

23. If you have read a book with a girl character, does the plot involve two girls in competition with one another?

- Yes

- Unsure
- No

## **Appendix B**

### **Additional Results.**

Below is a list of titles that the female students indicated that their favorite book characters are from.

- Bury Me
- City Of Ember
- Dog Man
- Dork Diaries (2)
- Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad
- Hilda and the Troll
- India
- La Llorona
- Matilda
- Nancy Drew
- Shakespeare Ghost Town
- Sisters
- The Babysitter Club
- The Bad Case of Stripes
- The Hunger Games
- The Last Kids on Earth
- The Storm in The Barn

- Tuck Everlasting
- Wizard of Once
- Words on Fire

## **Appendix C**

### **A: Statement of Purpose**

This organization takes on a book club-like structure where powerful and mindful college women are paired with 2 to 5 4<sup>th</sup>-grade female students to provide a meaningful space for reading, conversation, and mentorship. The women at the university would read and engage students in age-appropriate books that highlight strong female characters. They would ensure that all the girls have opportunity to participate and voice their thoughts. Each meeting will have a specific topic, but will allow for time to talk and interact with students for a mentoring and trusting relationships to form. The college women in this organization would be leaders and role models to these girls and the community. They will provide advice and install confidence into these young students before entering into middle where they will encounter new social and academic challenges.

### **B: Constitution.**

#### **Article I: empowARment through reading**

The name of the organization shall be **empowARment girls through reading**.

The organization's abbreviation/alternate name will be **empowARment**.

#### **Article II: Purpose Statement**

1. It shall be the purpose of empowARment through reading to provide young girls with role models through character education and mentorship while instilling the importance of readings.



2. It shall be the mission of empowARment through reading to ensure that female students feel confident in themselves and their beliefs before entering into middle school.

3. It shall be the belief of empowARment through reading that empowered women empower women. Therefore any powerful individual who identifies as female at the University of Arkansas that believes they can provide meaningful and age-appropriate guidance to young female students is invited to be a member of this organization.

### **Article III: Membership and Eligibility Requirements**

Section A: Membership is open to any enrolled student who:

1. Is enrolled in at least one credit hour at the University of Arkansas. **(This is University Policy)**
2. Has a passion for reading and mentorship of 4<sup>th</sup>-grade female students.
3. Identifies as female.

#### **Section B: A member may be removed for:**

1. Any inappropriate comment, guidance, or action that occurs inside or outside of this institution.
2. Not following the curriculum or structure during meetings with students.
3. Lack of participation or absence in RSO meetings, chats, or any other method where information is dispersed.

#### **Section C: Removal of Membership Procedures**

Any member may have their membership revoked by an executive officer and then confirmed by another member or officer.

Any member removed must appeal within a week of membership notice and schedule a meeting where appropriate documentation must be shown to the executive board and advisor. As well as,

complying a guide as to what specific changes will be made in the future to fix the issue and how they plan on making those changes to be successful in the organization. In order to reach a consensus on the membership of the individual more than half of the executive board AND the advisor must agree on status.

#### **Section D: Dues and Collection Procedures**

1. The fiscal year of the organization shall be from July 1st to June 30th. (This is University policy.)
2. The amount of annual dues shall be determined each year by the treasurer.
3. Dues shall not exceed \$35 per year.

#### **Article IV: Voting**

**Section A:** A quorum will be over half of the members of the organization.

**Section B:** The following guidelines are established for voting eligibility:

- Dues have been paid
- Active member of empowARment
- Meets GPA requirements

**Section C:** Proxy voting will not be allowed.

#### **Article V: Officers**

**Section A:** Requirements to be eligible to an officer are:

1. Must be enrolled full time at the University of Arkansas, maintain a minimum of a 2.25 cumulative grade point average, and not be on judicial or academic probation. (**This is University policy.**)

2. To be an executive officer of the organization (President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer) one must be in the club for at least a semester prior to serving on the board, besides the first semester of the RSO's existence.

**Section B:** empowARment through reading shall have a President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer. These officers comprise the Executive Board.

**Section C:** The term of office shall be from January to December.

**Section D:** Election of officers shall be held annually. Nominations shall be initiated (how/when) at the first meeting held in January. The person receiving the majority of votes will be elected. In the event no candidate receives the required percentage, runoffs will be held immediately. The two candidates with the most votes will have a run off and from there whoever has majority will get the position.

**Section E:** Any officer may be removed from membership by not fulfilling their required duties or not living out the ideals of this group. This removal must have majority vote of the executive board and the advisor.

Any officer removed may not appeal.

**Section F:** Any vacancy which may occur in an office shall be filled in the following manner:

- At the first meeting since the vacancy, the position availability is made aware to all members.
- Anyone interested in the position has a week to submit a document of their strengths as a candidate, the ideas for the positions, and their goals for the position.
- From there the document is shared with all members of the RSO and then the following meeting a vote is held.

## **Article VI: Duties of Officers**

Section A: *President*

1. The President shall be the chief executive officer.
2. The President shall oversee and support all officers.
3. The President will be the main point of contact for schools or parents.
4. Vacancies in offices will be filled by appointment of the President with approval of the general membership.
5. The president will find education programs for members certified in such as mandated reporting or other topics that be useful when working with children.

Section B: *Vice President*

1. The Vice President shall be the parliamentarian for the organization.
2. The Vice President shall assume the duties of the President should the office become vacant, or in the absence of the President.
3. The Vice President will keep and have available current copies of the constitution and bylaws.
4. The Vice President will be responsible for scheduling programing times for University women and 4<sup>th</sup>-grade students.
5. The Vice President will perform other duties as directed by the President.

Section C: *Secretary*

1. The Secretary shall be responsible for keeping the minutes of all meetings and the meetings of the executive board.
2. The Secretary will provide a copy of the minutes for each officer and keep a master file.
3. The Secretary shall maintain a complete and accurate account of attendance and membership status.

Section D: *Treasurer*

1. The Treasurer shall keep a current record of all financial transactions; and
2. The Treasurer shall develop quarterly reports containing a list of all receipts and disbursements and distribute them among the membership; and
3. The Treasurer will be responsible for checking the accuracy of all bills and invoices and paying them correctly and on time.
4. The Treasurer will perform other duties as directed by the President.

Section E: *Advisor—University Faculty/Staff Advisor*

1. The Advisor shall be a full-time faculty or staff member at the University of Arkansas.
2. The Advisor shall assist the group in the execution of roles and responsibilities.
3. The Advisor shall serve as a resource.
4. The Advisor should provide advice upon request and also should share knowledge and expertise.
5. The Advisor shall be a full-time faculty or staff member at the University of Arkansas.
6. The advisor will have the final say of approval of the books and lesson topics.

**Article VII: Group Committee Structure**

Section A: The following committees shall be appointed by the President, subject to ratification by the organization during a regular business meeting:

1. Book committee: that will find age- appropriate books to use for this program
2. Girl talk committee: creation of lesson or discussion topics for the week that correlate with the books being read.
3. Marketing committee: Oversees PR and social media for the group.

4. Outreach and pairing committee: Finds institutions or schools that might be interested in this reading/mentoring program for the President to reach out to. Then pairs 4<sup>th</sup>-grade female students with a University woman who would be a good mentor for the child based off interests.

### **Article VIII: Meetings**

Section A: Meetings shall occur 2 times per month not including the scheduled weekly meetings with 4<sup>th</sup>-grade students.

Section B: Robert's Rules of Order Revised shall be followed by the organization in all cases involving parliamentary procedure when it does not conflict with the constitution.

Section C: The rules may be suspended or changed by a majority vote of the present membership.

Ratification

Ratification Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Revised \_\_\_\_\_

Current President Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Advisor Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix D**

### **Graduate School.**

In the future the author has plans attending Graduate School. Therefore, would like to conduct further research about this topic and include the areas mentioned in the implications for future research section. Additionally, expanding upon the population sampled to students across the nation to gain further insight into the reading interest of early adolescent students and if those books have strong female leads.