



# Parents' preferences for children's books and parents' anxiety about children's literary consumption: A story from Indonesia

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## Abstract

Some parents may think a children's book is good, while others may not share that opinion. What is good is the core point of evaluation when parents select children's literature. The way parents conceptualize what is good is heavily influenced by family values involving religious, cultural, and educational values. It is particular and takes cultural context such as parents' cultural interpretation of child and childhood construct and children's agency. This article discusses the result of in-depth interviews with eight parents who share their opinions about what is good for their children's literary consumption. Combining theories of consumption studies and childhood studies, this article shows parents' opinions on the characteristics of children's books that are thought to be appropriate or not appropriate for children. The result shows that most parents in this study do not like heavily patronizing stories. This article reveals parents' anxiety at the content of sexuality and violence in children's books. Some parents avoid books that they think to violate their religious beliefs while others feel anxious about content that they think contaminates their cultural values.

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## Introduction

Parents have complex stances when choosing books for their children. Anderson et al. (2001) reveal that fathers and mothers have different ways to choose books for their children. Their choices are also different depending on the child's gender. They consider the subject matter and the aesthetic aspect of the books to decide whether the

books are worth buying. These two main book features of theme and illustration used as the parents' consideration are also confirmed by Svab and Zummer's study (2015). In that way, parents try to match the book with the children's development of language competence and available knowledge.

A preliminary study of parents' choices of children's books by a Google form and an interactive Instagram Live shows that some parents allow their children to read horror stories while other parents forbid their children to read them. Some parents prefer picture books with

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few words for their children in early childhood while others choose picture books with more words for children in that period. Some parents provide their children with folktales while others are questioning whether folktales are appropriate for children to read. Children's books about parents of the same sex are considered books of diversity by some parents in America (Miller, 2014) while those books are most likely challenged by many parents in Indonesia. Why do parents have different conceptions of what is good for children's literary consumption? How do parents regard the agency of young children under five years old and older children above five years old differently?

What is good for children is, thus, cultural arbitrary. Cultural arbitrary is a power that imposes particular meaning as legitimate by concealing its basis of power relation (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Cultural arbitrary of what is good is involved in the practice of selecting children's literature by parents as the gatekeepers of children's literary consumption. Parents' selection of children's literature influences the social construct of children and childhood in the particular society of a particular era.

Child as well as childhood is a social construct (Honig, 2009; Hunt, 2009; Lesnik-Oberstein, 1999; Qvortrup, 2009). There is nothing intrinsic in a real child that makes her/him a child. Social construct turns children into children in which children are not homogenous. UNESCO defines children as dependent subjects up to 18 years old (Zinnecker, 2001), but the meaning of dependency is not the same across cultures despite the problematic meaning of 'dependency' itself. The age of 18 can be a period for a child in Western culture to start his/her own life by leaving the house, but it would be different in Indonesia in which many parents still expect their children to live with them even if they get married. The same thing likely occurs in the way parents conceptualize what is good for children. Parents' conceptualization of what is good is constituted culturally and socially.

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## Literature Review

Saracho and Spodek (2010) reveal that parents in their study in America mostly choose popular books of modern children's fantasy like the animal story that personifies humans. Such a story is usually interesting for young children at five years old as involved in the research. The next most chosen are contemporary realistic fiction books. A small number of families choose

information books and traditional fairy tales. Poetry is the least chosen in the study.

McNair (2011) in his study on African-American Children's Literature reveals how parents and children (in kindergarten through second grade) select books they like to have for shared reading. Parents and children negotiate when they choose books for children. They use cover and title to indicate books they might prefer. Gender, personal experience, and interest are considered by the parents when choosing books for their children.

In her study about parents' perceptions of child preferences for picture books, Laura Wagner (2017) reveals that parents whose children are up to eleven years old tend to prefer familiar books that have been reprinted over years some of which are award-winning books. Some parents perceive that their sons will not like books with a female protagonist. They like books that are closely related to their experiences. Meanwhile, parents do not symmetrically perceive daughters.

Robertson and Reese (2017) reveal the genres usually provided by parents for children at three to five years old. Parents assume that narrative books are more beneficial for children's language development and literacy. Therefore, they provide narrative books more than expository books. Deitcher et al. (2019) reveal some elements considered by parents of young children who ranged in age between 44 to 82 months when choosing narrative picture books. Parents consider their preferences, their children's level of development, and the aspects of the books. Aspects of books that are taken into account are illustration, language, and social-emotional content. However, there is no explanation of the parents' choice background, or why they prefer books with the characteristics mentioned above. It is necessary to see the parents' social and cultural background which constitutes their book choice including their awareness of books with problematic representation as suggested by Kenyon and Christoff (2020) about trade books.

Some research has already revealed how parents select children's books based on the criteria of the books' material dimensions such as titles, illustrations, and themes. Few tell how the parents' background knowledge and their engagement with media as a part of their consumption practice might constitute the way they choose children's books as a form of children's literature. This study highlights the particular roles of parents' knowledge of children's literature, their adherence to religious values, and their involvement with other agents in the field of children's literature in the way they choose children's books.

## Methodology

Qualitative interviewing is used to collect data in this study, supplemented by online observation of the participants' activity on social media with their approval. This study involves semi-structured interviews with eight parents who are purposively chosen with various parents' gender roles, children's ages, and children's genders.

Due to the pandemic, some interviews were conducted via Zoom meetings. In these semi-structured interviews, the participants can share their experiences of providing books for children with underlined questions about what they think about good books and what they think about inappropriate books for children. There are at least ten questions proposed to each participant following his/her answers to those two main questions as it is a semi-structured interview. The interview took around an hour to two hours for each Participant. Book titles that are mentioned and shown by the parent participants are recorded as supporting data.

## Participants

### Participant 1

Participant 1 is a stay-at-home mother whose daughter is 3.5 years old. She holds a master's degree in communication studies. Participant 1 usually posts reviews of children's books she sells online on Instagram and marketplaces *Shopee* and *Tokopedia*.

### Participant 2

Participant 2 is a stay-at-home mother whose daughter is aged 3. She actively joins in communities of *Read Loud Jakarta Selatan* and *Ayo Dongeng Indonesia*. She likes to collect children's books and read them with her daughter. Participant 2 holds a master's degree in literary studies.

### Participant 3

Participant 3 is a stay-at-home father whose baby girl is aged 20 months. He is passionate about reading and writing stories. He aspires to write children's books. Participant 3 holds a bachelor's degree in public administration and worked in a financial department, but now he chooses to take care of his daughter at home.

### Participant 4

Participant 4 is a single mother whose daughter is aged 10. She holds a master's degree in literary studies,

and she teaches in the English Department at a state university. She likes her daughter to enjoy reading detective and horror stories.

### Participant 5

Participant 5 is a father of three children. The first child is a girl aged 10 and the others are boy and girl twins aged 8. The father holds a master's degree in literary studies and works in the State's research department. He likes to provide his children with books of classic literature and folktales.

### Participant 6

Participant 6 is a stay-at-home mother whose sons are aged 11 and 6. She holds a bachelor's degree in English literature. She usually checks and reads children's books before she gives them to her sons.

### Participant 7

Participant 7 is a father of two little girls aged 4 and 18 months. He is one of three fathers who join in Read Aloud community of his district, whose members are mostly mothers. He studied Geology and now works as a researcher. He writes some children's books, one of which is about geology.

### Participant 8

Participant 8 is the father of a 4-year-old boy. He likes to buy informational books for his son. He once worked in the department of research and development in a national daily newspaper. Therefore, he cares enough about reliable data in informational children's books.

## Data Collection

There are two age groups of children. The first one is under five years old, which is considered not able to read yet by themselves, and when parents have a big role in choosing the books. The second group is aged above five, in which children are considered to be able to read books by themselves and start to choose books of their preferences. This age identification is necessary to see parent-child's negotiation in choosing books they prefer, along with their social background.

## Data Analysis

The interviews are taped and transcribed to prepare for the coding process. Coding is conducted in two levels. Firstly, keywords about *what is good* are recorded and clustered into parents' preferences and parents' anxiety.

Next, the clustered words are connected to religious teaching, parenting guides, concepts of children's literature, and others.

## Results and Discussion

### *What is Good, What is Bad, and the Demarcation between the Two*

The following table shows keywords taken from frequent words that are mentioned by the parents when they give opinions about what is good for children's literary consumption. Some words expressed are oppositional adjectives that show that choices are uttered mostly in negative preferences as stated by Bourdieu (1984) that taste is expressed partly in the negation of the taste of others.

**Table 1** Keywords to describe what is good and what is bad

The good	The bad
About children	About adults
Arousing critical thinking	Vulgar
Simple stories	Sophisticated stories
Fun	Patronizing
Comic	Manga, anime, webtoon
Embedment of local culture	Foreign culture
Philosophical	Educational
In favor of children	Preachy
Giving knowledge	Containing sexuality
Giving cultural views	Containing violence
Reinforcing empathy	Violating religious belief
Developing creativity	Containing unreliable data
Interactive	Unreal objects
Implicit message	Explicit message
Classic	Popular
Showing	Telling

Woodward (2007, 2012) proposes that the practice of selecting and choosing objects is related to making classificatory judgments about the objects which shows what people like and why they like the objects and implies the discourse in which the choices are situated and how the choices make them similar or different to others. Participant 4 and Participant 3 use the word *berpikir kritis* (critical thinking) to describe what children develop when reading good books. Critical thinking is one of the prominent skills which is expected to achieve in the school curriculum. Therefore, many parents wish their children to develop the skill.

*"Karena ternyata antara membaca sama menonton yang didapat lebih banyak membaca. Kayak gitu kan? Mulai dari.. hm.. selain dia juga lebih meningkatkan critical thinkingnya [Turns out between reading and watching, there is more benefit from reading. Is that right? Starting from.. hm.. she will develop her critical thinking]."*  
(Participant 4, personal communication, July 29, 2021).

*"Nah, kalau ini saya beli, menurut saya kriterianya untuk anak yang sudah lebih tua, dan pembahasannya sebenarnya sederhana, meskipun ada tujuan gimana caranya anak-anak itu bisa berpikir kritis [I bought this for older children. The discussion is simple but it can make children think critically]."*  
(Participant 3, personal communication, August 8, 2021).

Participant 6 uses the word *sederhana* (simple) to describe suitable language and content in children's books for early readers. Participant 6 and Participant 8 avoid stories that are considered *rumit* (complicated) because they are afraid the children will not enjoy them. Participant 6 and Participant 8 use the word *berat* (sophisticated) to describe what is not preferred about children's books for early readers. On the contrary, Participant 4 intentionally chooses stories with complicated narratives to challenge her child's critical thinking. Thus, what is good depends on what the books are for (Hunt, 1999).

*"Dialektika, ya, dari Clara Ng. Itu kan bagus sebenarnya. Tapi kita belum, belum ini, belum apa namanya? Sampai sekarang itu belum bacakan buat dia karena kita tahu, ini agak berat nih [Dialektika, by Clara Ng. It's actually good but we haven't read it to him because we think it is a bit sophisticated]."*  
(Participant 8, personal communication, January 1, 2022).

Participant 2 emphasizes that the importance of children's books is being fun because the purpose of reading books is to have fun and escape from the real world which is full of rules and orders. She seems to contrast the characteristics of fun with the characteristics of patronizing. Both words are related but distinct, as Woodward (2007) explains about how people conceptualize what they evaluate. Participant 2 even says that a book that is *edukatif* (educational) is not fun. Thus, the educational book is not a good book for children. While the term "educational" is usually used positively, it becomes negative in children's literature for parents like Participant 2. She argues that children's books should minimize adult voice

because the adult voice makes the books sound educational and boring. Thus, Participant 2 perceives the word “educational” as something unpleasant because it is similar to giving advice. According to Participant 2, educational books are not in favor of children (*tidak berpihak pada anak*). The word “educational” is perceived as a negative characteristic in the field of children’s literature, at least for Participant 2, while it is usually perceived as a positive disposition in the field of nurturing children.

Participant 6 and Participant 5, whose children are above 5 years and are already able to read by themselves, prefer to choose comic books for the kids because comic books are considered attractive for children while Participant 3 does not prefer comic books because they are considered too complicated for a baby like his child. Moreover, he is informed by his mentor in the storytelling community that comic books are not good for children, especially toddlers. In this way, Participant 3 gets an insight into what is good from other people whom he thinks to be legitimizing agents in the field of children’s literature.

Unlike comic books, manga, anime, and webtoons are usually mentioned by Participants 3, 4, and 6 when they talk about undesired reading materials for children. Manga is a Japanese comic book that is not addressed specifically to children. Anime is a Japanese animation with similar pictures to manga. Webtoon is an online digital comic strip. Those three materials are usually mentioned together by the parents when they talk about worrying materials. Manga, anime, and webtoons are associated with vulgar pictures such as female characters in tight clothes. Such images are thought to be inappropriate for children. This opinion is also disposed of by religious belief that women should not wear clothes that expose their bodies.

Participant 4 and Participant 6 are concerned with the difference between *our* culture and *foreign* culture. Our culture is usually referred to as *budaya kita* (our culture), *budaya lokal* (local culture) while foreign culture is usually referred to as *bukan budaya kita* (it’s not our culture), *budaya sana* (their culture), *budaya luar* (other culture). Participant 4 sets up a demarcation of *our* culture and *their* culture. Our culture is narrated as the culture which should be well embraced while their culture is referred to as *the other*, which is considered to be bad.

“Kemudian, nah itu paling yang memang pada akhirnya itu yang membutuhkan pendampingan bahwa memang budaya sini dengan budaya sana kan...itu berbeda [It needs guidance that our culture and their culture are different].”

(Participant 4, personal communication, July 29, 2021).

“Oke kamu membaca ini, terus setidaknya tahu tentang budaya sana. Memang hal yang memang kita tidak bisa masuk, tidak bisa itu tidak bisa kita tiru, tidak, tidak boleh kita tiru [Ok, you could read this, at least you know their culture. It is not a culture we can emulate]”

(Participant 4, personal communication, July 29, 2021).

Paradoxically, Participant 4, who seems cautious of other cultures, approves of her child who prefers translated stories from other countries. The foreign content is seen as that which should be kept away from the child, but it is also desired. This ambivalence implies a postcolonial view that sees ‘otherness’ as an object of desire as well as derision (Bhabha, 1994). On the contrary, Participant 6 prefers teen novels written by Indonesian writers to translated novels from foreign writers because she wants to avoid the different values of other cultures.

Adult stuff is not expected in children’s books. Adults and children are thought to be different and they should be separated. Participant 4 says that she feels troubled when there is adult language in children’s books. It is implied that there are distinguished adult language and child language. What she refers to as adult language is swearing words as she reads in *Petualangan Tintin* (The Adventures of Tintin). In this way, adult language is narrated as bad language that is not proper for children to imitate. Participant 2 also mentions adult language which she does not prefer, but it is not about the swearing words. She does not prefer a child character in children’s books, which sounds like an adult due to the language. She writes in her blog about a book titled *Mirah Mini* (Little Mirah) written by Nukila Amal. She likes the story, but she points out how the main character aged 5 years old sounds more like an adult than a child of her age.

Adult language is thought to be ruining a child’s ‘innocence’ in two forms, as bad words and as patronizing moral lessons. Both things which seem contradictory to each other are comparably not preferred. Like Participant 2, Participant 4 criticizes a child’s character with an adult way of thinking and adult habit. She does not prefer adult stories or adult plots used in children’s books. In the same manner, Participant 3 criticizes *Princess Story* because he thinks it is an adult story.

Participant 5, however, has different preferences. He intentionally provides his children with stories about adults in the form of classic literature. Participant 5 expects the children to recognize adult life in adult stories so they will see various people with different obstacles.



The children are expected to learn how adults alleviate their problems in life. The adult realm is not a domain that should be forbidden for children but introduced. Adults and children are not separated. Children can learn about life from adult stories as life is for all. Participant 6 also lets her child read what is not children's literature when her child asks to read novels from her collection. She picks what she thinks is *suitable* for him.

Philosophical content is among those that Participant 3 likes about children's books. Philosophy is considered sophisticated knowledge because the common assumption says that it is complicated to understand. Understanding what is perceived to be difficult is considered a distinct achievement. However, Participant 3 says that it is more respectable for someone who can make difficult philosophy easier to understand. He refers to such children's books written by Clara Ng.

Good children's books are usually referred to as books which are thought to give children insight, knowledge, cultural outlook, and empathy reinforcement. Those words are mentioned when discussing good books for children. There are also some words mentioned concerning undesired content in children's books. Sexuality, violence, homosexuality, adult stuff, and 'otherness' are not expected in children's books. In this way, the logic of cultural producers and cultural consumers in the field of children's literature is homologous that the producers' products seemingly meet the consumers' needs as proposed by Bourdieu (1984).

Children's literature is often thought to be didactic and contains moral lessons most of the time. However, parents like Participant 1 and Participant 2 dislike explicit moral lessons in children's books and prefer implicit ones, unlike Participant 8 who clearly expects a moral lesson in children's books. What matters is the way parents say that they do not like patronizing books and an explicit moral lesson in books implies a manner they use to distinguish themselves from other parents who buy moralizing books.

### *Parents' Anxiety about Children's Literary Consumption*

The opinions of what is good about children's books imply parents' anxiety about children's literary consumption. Demarcations or boundaries are set up due to parents' anxiety about what is forbidden for children to consume. Things associated with sexuality and violence are frequently mentioned by parents when they share what they are worried about with children without supervision. Sexuality is considered taboo in children's

literature (Cook, 2020). There are also other contents that make parents feel anxious.

Parents' anxiety results from what parents assume to be child stuff and adult stuff. Participant 3 plans how he will protect his child when she grows up and goes to bookstores with him. He is anxious at "inappropriate" pictures and girls' comic books which usually tell about romance. Participant 6 does not let her children read *Winnetou* because it contains detailed violence. She can tolerate violence in stories as long as they explain that the characters have to use violence to save people. Participant 4 says that pictures are more dangerous than written words because children directly consume what is seen. Therefore, she is anxious about online platforms such as manga and anime. Participant 1 and Participant 8 admit that they hide some books that their children like because they think the books are not good for them due to the unexpected theme or the complicated language. Parents get rid of some books to alleviate their anxiety. The anxiety is actually due to adult stuff which is thought to be contamination.

Participant 6 says that she enjoyed stories about ghosts like *Goosebumps* when she was a kid, but now she says that she will not give it to her kids because she thinks that the stories in the book violate her religious belief. A parent might enjoy a certain book in her childhood but she has a different perception when she reads it later as an adult due to her religious belief.

Participant 7 and his wife do not like books that tell about the real world or books about mythical creatures because such stories are against their religious teaching. They do not like a children's book titled *Smong, Si Raksasa Laut* (Smong, the Ocean Giant) because it takes a dragon as the character of the story. They believe that dragons do not exist, so they get rid of such a story. They do not like stories of fantasy, horror, or myth likewise. Religious values are used as a reference to determine what is good for children.

As with any other goods, children's books are cultural props. Their uses are social. They can be used as a protection or a transmission tool (Douglas & Isherwood, 1996). Children's books as the products in the field of children's literature are chosen by parents by setting up demarcations or boundaries of what is not expected of their children. In this way, children's literature is used as a fence to protect children from what is thought to be harmful. On the other hand, children's literature is also used as a bridge to connect children with their parents' ideal expectations. Thus, it is necessary to contextualize the practice of consuming children's literature within the social and cultural process.

It should be noted that all parents in this study are in a social space of middle-class families with profitable economic capital and high volume of the cultural capital of college education. Some of them even have educational backgrounds in literary studies. Moreover, Participant 1, Participant 2, Participant 3, and Participant 7 are members of the *Read Aloud Community*, in which the discussions of children's books are regularly circulated. Parents who stay at home more with their children have more time to observe their children and to learn about good books for them by joining in reading community or by checking some sources.

### *Parents's Construction of Children*

Children are living on a continuum. Parents treat them differently from newborns, toddlers, kids, teenagers, and young adults. The way parents select literary material for their children shows the way they construct children in their phase. Adults might dominate the domain of children's literature (Nodelman, 2008; Rose, 1993) but children are not without agency in the way they choose books to read. Children at an early age have a different form of agency from those in older age, who can read by themselves.

Parents authorize children to choose books more at an early age around 0–5 years old, especially when children are not able to read yet. It does not mean that children cannot negotiate their parents' choices. Children at an early age might refuse to read books chosen for them because they do not like the color or the characters in the books. They can also choose books provided in the home library by themselves based on their favorite pictures and stories, although the provided books are those of their parent's choice.

The idea of 'child' is different among the authors and critics of children's literature (Lesnik-Oberstein, 1999). Parents also have different constructions of a child. Participant 2 constructs children as free creatures. She expects children should be children who are different from adults. Participant 4 also constructs children as individuals who are different from adults. Children are thought to be less capable than adults. Paradoxically, Participant 4 implies that children need adult guidance to avoid adult contamination.

Books are a means for inculcating children with knowledge and moral lessons. Parents use books for particular purposes. Therefore, books are chosen based on the purpose of reading (Hunt, 1999). A book is good for a particular purpose but possibly not for different purposes. Participant 4 likes her child to read books to

increase her critical thinking. Participant 4 thinks that critical thinking is an important skill that is beneficial for the child when she grows up. Therefore, she chooses detective and horror stories that arouse readers' curiosity about the plot. Participant 5 provides his children with comic books of classic literature to get them to learn how the characters face the hardships of life. Both Participant 4 and Participant 5 conceptualize the survival mode for the children to become adults. A form of power or technique of inculcating preferred knowledge that the parents exercise over the children makes them subjects. The way parents determine what is good is a way to construct the children's individuality.

### *Different Agency of Children in Different Age Groups*

Children are not homogeneous but a child can be used as a reference for other children. As a bookseller, Participant 1 uses her child, who is not five years old yet, as an examiner of new arrival books. She observes her child's reaction toward the books to predict other child readers' preferences. It shows how children contribute to the development of children's culture. They are also involved in the field testing of children's books by a particular publisher before the books are released in the market, as told by Participant 1. Children might have limited chances to choose books for themselves, especially those who are not able to read yet. However, they can accept or refuse books offered by their parents.

However, parents' conceptualization of *what is good* implies symbolic violence in which they impose certain meanings and beliefs on children for the interest of the parents. Symbolic violence needs the complicity of the receivers (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). The receivers accept their dominated condition as legitimate (Swartz, 1997). In this case, parents' domination is accepted by their children as legitimate power. Symbolic violence is also implied in the way parents censor what children are allowed to read. Participant 1 hides a book about grieving from her child because she does not want her to be sad. Participant 8 hides some books which are thought to have complex languages for his child aged 4 although the child enjoys the books. Those children are made to get rid of the books they enjoy because their parents think that the books are not good for their cognitive development. The books are thought to ruin children's development and parents' expectations of their growth. It shows that the agency of children under five years old is limited to their incapability of reading and parents' power to provide what is available to read.

Children also have an agency that influences adults' decisions and children's culture (Gubar, 2011). Participant 4 observes that her child, who is over five years old and able to read by herself, likes to read fantasy stories with an element of mystery. She suggests her child pick a book titled *Magic Library*, but the child refuses it because she is not interested in the title. Participant 4 keeps buying the book and puts it in the child's room, hoping that the child will read it someday. The child finally checks the story and finds out that the story is boring and that she is not interested to continue reading it. She says that the pace of the story is too slow and the title is not convincing. She says that the weirder the title is, the more promising the story will be, like those of the *Harry Potter* series. She does not consider the pictures very much. She says that she prefers the setting of many places like those in *Tintin*. It shows how a child can identify what she likes and what she does not like. Participant 4 admits that she intentionally built up a reading habit since the child was an early age, but the child loves reading later by herself. The child eagerly asks the mother to go to a book exhibition to get books she chooses by herself. Children's preferences are taken into account when some parents choose books for them.

Older children who can read by themselves have more chances to choose books by themselves although the books' genre is already predicted and approved by the parents. Children are not independent or incapable. Their agency is not synonymous with autonomy (Gubar, 2016). Wyness (2005) and Zelizer (2005) call this kind of children's agency children's participation. Although children cannot always get what they want to read, their preferences are already noted by their parents. When choosing books, parents consider the desired values as well as children's preferences in which children participate in parents' consuming of children's literature.

### *Parents' Gender and Children's Gender in the Connection to Book Choices*

In this study, mothers' and fathers' choices of books do not show differences regarding their gender. Participant 1 (a mother), Participant 2 (a mother), Participant 3 (a father), and Participant 7 (a father) have similar criteria for good books since they join in the same community of Read Aloud. They like books that are not patronizing. Participant 6 (a mother) and Participant 7 (a father) are cautious with books that are thought to be violating their religious values. Regarding children's gender, only Participant 7, who has two daughters, mentions children's books that particularly tell about

woman characters as mothers such as *Ibu Fatimah yang Murah Hati* (Mother Fatimah Who is Generous), *Ummu Suraith yang Teguh Iman* (Mother Suraith Who Has Strong Faith), *Ibunda Asma* (Mother Asma), and *Ummu Aiman* (Mother Aiman).

Parents in this study do not intentionally classify books for girls and books for boys. However, when asked about books based on gender, some of them give opinions on princess stories. Participant 4 says she does not know about books for girls or books for boys but she states that she will never invite the child to read princess stories because she thinks the story is all about being a girl, like having a diet and all. She and her child once purchased a princess story book in a bookstore because they could not find others to buy. When they read the story at home, they decided not to buy such stories anymore.

Participant 6 does not mind providing books with the main female characters for her little boys as long as there are values to learn in the stories. She shows a book titled *Heidy* in her child's collection. It is just, she says, that the kids do not like books whose covers are too girly like princess stories and *Hello Kitty*. She says that the boys are fine with *Frozen* and *Moana*, but they will refuse *Snow White*, *Rapunzel*, and *Sofia*. When her older boy is asked why he does not like the stories mentioned in the latter, he says the books were not provided at home and his mom never asks him to watch the movies of the stories. Likely, the child does not refuse the stories but the stories are not provided, so he does not consume them. Mother classifies princess stories into two categories. There are tough princesses like Elsa in *Frozen* and *Moana*, and there are fragile princesses like Rapunzel, Snow White, and Sofia. Tough princesses are praised, and fragile princesses are undesired. The mother selects stories of tough princesses as more appropriate for the boys.

As a father of a baby girl, Participant 3 does not like to provide his child with princess stories because he thinks the stories are not for children. He perceives them as adult stories. Participant 5 does not comment on princess stories. He just says that his eldest daughter likes the stories, but the second child does not. The second daughter prefers stories about superheroes like her twin brother. Participant 5 says he does not believe that there are books for girls and books for boys. That is slightly different from Participant 1. She thinks the perception of books for boys and books for girls is created by parents and publishers. She criticizes how some publishers are less concerned with gender equality.



Participant 1 provides her little girl with books which are usually assumed as books for boys such as books about means of transportation. She shows how she is aware of the social construction of gender bias about girls. Therefore, she resists it by providing the so-called books-for-boys for her girl, contrary to what she perceives as social construction. Some people tend to make resistance by doing things on the contrary instead of doing both the accepted norms and the contrary. Parents might give books for boys to their girls, but it is rarely that parents give books for girls to their boys as proposed by Wagner (2017). Providing boys' books for girls is considered as resistance while providing girls' books for boys is considered as an acceptance of gender equality.

### Conclusion and Recommendation

Parents have authority over the children to select books for them. However, some parents just let their children choose what they want while others maintain their authority to approve or disapprove of their children's choices. Parents' authority over younger children is different from that over older children who can read by themselves. Older children have more agency to choose books by themselves. Their choice contributes to parents' consideration of book selection regarding genres.

Parents' conceptions of what is good for children are influenced by legitimizing agents in the field of children's literature such as the reading community or prominent figures in the field of children's literature. Parents find that patronizing stories are not delightful for children. They also feel uneasy with the content of sexuality and violence. Some parents feel worried about the content that is thought to violate their religious beliefs and content that is thought to contaminate their cultural values.

This study does not find differences between mothers' choices and fathers' choices regarding their gender among the eight informants, but there are possibly different results with other kinds of informants. This study does not see differences in parents' choices for boys and girls, but parents tend to disregard princess stories which are perceived as books for girls. This shows that it is easier to identify books for girls while books for boys are considered books for all.

This article is based on interviews with parents in the social space of the middle class. It is necessary to observe other parents in different social spaces to see how social class is most likely to influence parents' choices of children's books as products in the field of children's literature.

### Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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