Depictions of Public Service in Children's Literature: Revisiting an Understudied Aspect of Political Socialization*

Christopher A. Cooper, *University of Tennessee, Knoxville*

Marc Schwerdt, *University of Tennessee, Knoxville*

Objective. Scholars who have investigated depictions of public service in children's literature have come to a mix of conclusions regarding the portrayal of public figures in children's literature. We revisit these studies, attempting to answer the question of how public servants are portrayed in children's literature. *Methods*. We perform content analysis of 93 books and examine 868 characters for benevolence and competence. *Results*. We find that public servants are portrayed as no more incompetent or malevolent than other adults in children's literature. On a few dimensions, we find just the opposite. Furthermore, we find that women in general are portrayed as more benevolent than men, although the same patterns are not found between sexes when examining only those in the public service. *Conclusions*. If children are developing negative stereotypes of government officials and institutions, these stereotypes do not appear to be formed through their reading of children's literature.

The acquisition of political values and beliefs has been a central research topic in political science for most of the 20th century. Studies have looked at the role of parents (Tedin, 1974; Jennings and Niemi, 1968), the media (Conway et al., 1982), and political events (Sears and Valentino, 1997) in shaping individual political attitudes. Surprisingly, whereas scholars have studied children's political attitudes for a number of years, few have looked at the role of children's literature in political socialization. Those studies that have been conducted fail to answer the central question of how governmental actors are portrayed in children's literature. This paper aims to provide a conclusive answer to this question, eliminating methodological

*Direct all correspondence to Christopher A. Cooper, Department of Political Science, 1001 McClung Tower, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN 37996-0410 <e-mail:cooper23@utk.edu>. An earlier version of this paper was delivered at the July 2000 meeting of the International Society for Political Psychology. We would like to acknowledge the helpful comments received at that conference and the suggestions of the anonymous reviewers as well as the help of David J. Houston, Anthony J. Nownes, Lilliard E. Richardson, and Pamela Smuzynski. The authors are listed alphabetically and contributed equally to this paper. The data are available on request.

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problems that haunted previous scholars while staying true to their central assertion that children's literature is important in developing political attitudes and stereotypes in children (Cook, 1982).

What Has Been Done Before?

Early studies of children's literature suggested that children's books portray public figures and the public service as overwhelmingly positive. Greenstein (1960) and Hess and Easton (1960) concluded that children receive positive impressions of government authority from their reading of children's books. Greenstein (1975) and Jaros, Hirsch, and Fleron (1968) refined these optimistic appraisals by finding variation across culture and race. They concluded that children in other countries and some groups within American society are more cynical in their evaluations of authority figures.

The original assertion of positive depictions of authority in children's literature is supported in Thomas Marshall's (1981) study of children's books and television programs. Using a random sampling of books, Marshall demonstrated that bureaucrats and government workers are generally portrayed as "heroic figures" rather than insignificant individuals operating within a large organization. "Overall, government appears in the media as a positive and benevolent force, delivering needed and sought-after services with skill and compassion. . . . America's child-oriented mass media produce an overwhelmingly favorable portrait of the public sector for America's youth" (Marshall, 1981:397).

Tim Cook (1983) takes issue with Marshall's method of sampling, which consisted of pulling books off the children's shelf of a local library at random. According to Cook, although Marshall provides an accurate picture of "the content of, say, a children's section of a library, it need not give a representative sample of what children read" (Cook, 1983:327). Cook provides anecdotal evidence of the particularly negative portrayals of government officials found in the literature of Dr. Seuss and L. Frank Baum, noting that some books are more widely read than others and therefore more influential on developing stereotypes and attitudes.

Chilton and Chilton (1993) pick up where Cook's "methodological quibble" leaves off by performing a content analysis of the population of Dr. Seuss books. They conclude that government workers are generally depicted in a malevolent, "less than competent" manner throughout the works of Dr. Seuss. Chilton and Chilton suggest that this negative depiction plays a role in developing the negative stereotypes of bureaucrats and government services that have prevailed in recent years.

Why We Still Have No Satisfactory Answer

Despite the work of previous scholars, we maintain that the question of how public service figures are portrayed in children's literature has yet to be answered satisfactorily. We take issue with three shortcomings found in previous studies.

First, no one has taken a proper sample of books. If the goal of this research program is to provide a glimpse of how public servants are depicted in the most frequently read children's literature, previous studies have failed. As Cook (1983) pointed out, Marshall's random sample does not necessarily provide a glimpse of the most widely read children's books. Chilton and Chilton's study, although a step forward, does not provide a much better sample. Although Dr. Seuss may be the best-selling children's author, he does not provide a representative sample of what America's children are reading. Dr. Seuss had a well-documented political agenda, and the author himself once commented, "I am subversive as hell" (Fensch, 1997:117). Surely all children's authors do not feel the same way. Would this result in a different portrayal of bureaucrats in the work of other authors? We think so.

In order to combat this problem, we provide a broader and more representative sample. Our study involves content analysis of the best-selling children's books from 1900 through 1996 as compiled by *Publishers Weekly* (Fensch, 1997:205–08). Using this list provides a number of advantages over previous studies. First, it concentrates on more than one author and therefore is not subject to the biases inherent in coding only one author. Second, although sales figures cannot necessarily be equated with number of readers, they are as good an estimate as can be achieved and serve as a suitable proxy for the most widely read books (Chilton and Chilton, 1993). Third, following Lystad's (1980) findings concerning the shifts in social values found in children's literature from the 19th to 20th centuries, our list examines books published over a number of years by different authors and aimed at different age groups. Without question, we feel more comfortable generalizing to the population of all children's books from this sample than from the samples of previous studies.

Our second criticism is that previous scholars have provided no basis for comparison of public servants to all other adults. It is well established that adults in general are portrayed poorly in children's literature. Whereas children are often portrayed as having all the answers, adults in children's literature are characterized as bumbling, unkind, and often indifferent to the plight of others. As a result, we believe that Chilton and Chilton's findings regarding negative depictions of public servants may merely be an artifact of the negative depictions of all adults in children's literature.

In order to test this, we code not just public officials and employees found in the books we examine, but all adults. Public servants are compared to other adults to see if the two groups are portrayed differently. We also add the dimension of sex to our study, one left unexamined by previous

scholars. To test these differences, we employ a two-tailed difference-of-means test. With the addition of a comparison group, an improved data source, and the addition of a sex variable, we believe our study will provide a marked improvement over past works.

It is important to note that we do not test for how portrayals of public service in children's literature are perceived by children. This study merely looks at the depictions themselves, not how children interpret them. Although this is a limitation of this study, it does not imply that this study is unimportant. Before researchers can understand how children perceive children's literature, they must understand how public service is depicted in that literature. A complete understanding of children's literature as an agent of socialization would completely trace this path from representation to understanding. This study seeks only to address the first half of this problem. Future studies should work from the findings presented here and address the second half.

What Did We Look For?

Public servants, by virtue of their positions, work on behalf of others. It is therefore commonly concluded that the duties of public servants in democratic societies include courtesy toward others and considering the welfare of private citizens. Chilton and Chilton's (1993) findings seem to contradict these widely held beliefs about public servants, calling into question the types of images children acquire from society. If public servants are portrayed negatively, does this mean they are singled out by authors of children's books? To answer this question, we must ascertain whether there are differences in the manner in which adults and public servants are represented in children's literature. Our research question specifically asks if public servants are portrayed more negatively than adults in general.

We complement this question with an attempt to discover differences in the way the sexes are portrayed in children's literature, both in public service roles and those outside of the public sphere. Women are often portrayed in society as more nurturing than men, whereas men's roles frequently reflect their problem-solving ability. Therefore, if children's literature follows these commonly accepted stereotypes, there should be corresponding contrasts between male and female public servants in children's literature. We look for the following sex differences:

1. Males are portrayed more competently and benevolently than women, regardless of role.
2. Male public servants are portrayed as more competent and less benevolent than female public servants.
3. Male private citizens are portrayed as more competent and less benevolent than female private citizens.

The data were collected by performing content analysis on each book in our sample. The coding was simplified considerably by the straightforward nature of children's literature. We followed the example of Chilton and Chilton (1993) by coding for benevolence and competence based upon the text and illustrations found in the books. Whereas Marshall (1981) and Chilton and Chilton (1993) code only characters depicted as public servants, we coded all adult characters regardless of occupational status. This provides the advantage of a comparison group.

In order to ensure that each researcher employed the coding scheme in the same manner, we tested for intercoder reliability. First, we coded five books together to establish a baseline. Each researcher then performed independent content analysis on the same 10 books. Results from each researcher's analysis were then compared to test for reliability. We achieved 95 percent intercoder agreement on the 10 books examined. The remainder of the books were divided equally among the researchers to complete the analysis. This methodology is consistent with the recommendations of Weber (1990) and Krippendorff (1980).

Sample Selection

Our sample consists of 91 books selected from the top 115 best-selling children's books through 1996. The Chilton and Chilton (1993) study, by contrast, looked only at books by Dr. Seuss, a sample subsumed within ours, as Dr. Seuss has written many of the top-selling children's books. Some books were unavailable for examination, and others, such as the *MacMillan's Dictionary for Children* and *The Cat in the Hat Beginner Book Dictionary*, were inappropriate for our study. Other texts not included were *The Children's Bible* and the *Where's Waldo* series by Martin Handford. *The Children's Bible*, although a perfect example of the attempt to use literature as a means of transmitting and reinforcing values, was not examined because the sheer number of characters was overwhelming. *Where's Waldo* was excluded because it had no plot and no words and was not representative of the universe of children's literature.

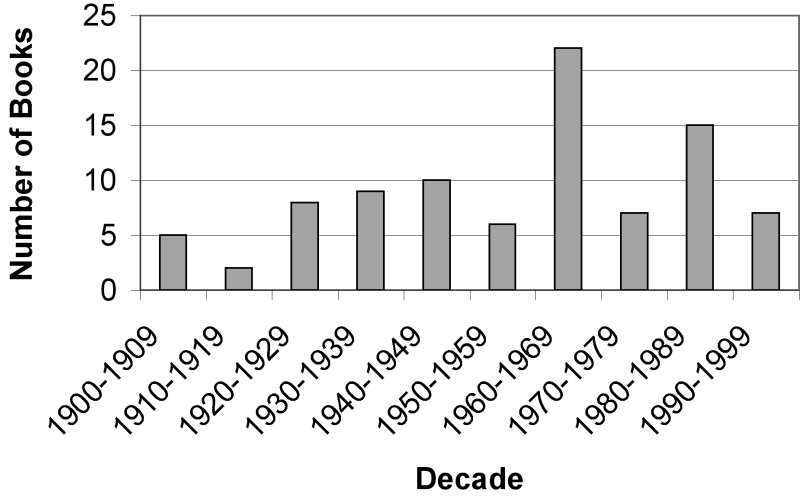
We examined a total of 868 characters. The number of adult characters in each book is wide ranging. Books such as *Where's Spot?* contain only one adult character, whereas others, like the *Nancy Drew* and *Hardy Boys* mysteries, contain upward of two dozen adult characters. On average, each book contained 9.51 adult characters, 1.95 public-sector employees, and 7.56 other adults.

The distribution of books over time shows that although we do not have an even distribution of books published in each decade, we do have a reasonable distribution. Figure 1 demonstrates that each decade in the 20th century is represented. Furthermore, children's books often stay in print for decades; thus the overrepresentation of books from the 1960s is not particularly problematic. Some books have fallen out of fashion over the years,

but the works of Beatrix Potter and Dr. Seuss are as popular with today's children as they were decades ago.

FIGURE 1

Number of Books per Decade (1900–99)



To aid in comparison across studies, we used the same categories as were employed in previous studies to measure benevolence and competency (Chilton and Chilton, 1993; Marshall, 1981). The categories and variables are defined as follows and are listed in the Appendix.

Adult/Nonadult

Adults in our sample were first distinguished from children by noting if an honorific was attached to their name, such as Mr., Mrs., Miss, or Doctor. Adults were also easily distinguished when they had some manner of authority over a child, such as being a parent, or were in some way in charge of the child's behavior. Unless otherwise identified, all characters with a job were also coded as adults. If pictures were available it was a simple task to differentiate between adults and nonadults.

Children's books, such as those by Dr. Seuss and many of the Mother Goose rhymes, often use animals instead of human characters, sometimes interweaving human and animal relationships in the same story or nursery rhyme. Animals and nonhumans were classified as adults through the same logic as was used to classify humans. Characters with adult facial character-

istics, such as mustaches and beards, were classified as adults, whereas children often had distinguishing marks, such as pigtails for girls.

Public Servant/Non–Public Servant

The status of an adult character as a bureaucrat was also easy to determine. Under our criteria, a public servant was identified as an employee of the government. Law enforcement personnel, firefighters, teachers, post office workers, and elected officials all fell under these headings. Much more difficult to classify are those in many of the nursery rhymes who are a member of the aristocracy, such as lords or ladies. Some lords and ladies were associated only with the class of aristocracy, rather than any position within a government. Kings and queens by definition personify government, and therefore even if a queen or king had no active role described in a book or nursery rhyme, she or he was coded as a public servant.

Benevolence/Malevolence

The benevolent intentions of the adults in our sample were established by looking for certain actions and desires. We asked three questions to determine the benevolence or malevolence of the characters. The questions and variable names are as follows:

1. Does the character exhibit soothing gestures or language toward others? [SOOTHE]
2. Does the character exhibit a desire to protect another character from harm? [PROTECT]
3. Are there any actions that the character takes that can be considered self-sacrificing? [SACRIFICE]

Each of these three questions will be examined in turn.

Soothing gestures and language are relatively easy to determine in children's literature. The benevolent intention of a character is easily inferred from a pat on the head, a gentle smile, or a simple comforting phrase from an adult. Conversely, when an adult tried to purposefully upset or disturb another character, the event was coded as a negative. The following exchange between the victim of a robbery and the Hardy Boys in *The Tower Treasure* was typical:

> "These boys want to look through the old tower."
> "What for? Up to some mischief?"
> "They think they can find the bonds and jewels in the tower."
> "Oh, they do, do they?" the woman said icily. "And what would the bonds and jewels be doing in the old tower?" (Dixon, 1959:123).

The only ambiguities apparent in our selections were separating effects from actions. For example, characters may be soothed by the presence of a police

officer, but he may not actually be taking any action to allay the fears of others. To avoid any coding problems, we have coded only the gestures made and the dialogue said by adult characters.

The second question determines if an adult warns another character or takes some action to prevent harm to someone else. Warnings may take the form of a gentle reminder from a mother to her child not to cross the street without looking first or a shout to warn of impending danger. The injunction of Peter Rabbit's mother in Beatrix Potter's classic readily comes to mind:

> "Now, my dears," said old Mrs. Rabbit one morning, "you may go into the fields or down the lane, but don't go into Mr. McGregor's garden: your Father had an accident there; he was put in a pie by Mrs. McGregor. Now run along and don't get into mischief." (Potter, 1902:11–13)

Meanwhile, incidents involving the intentions and actions of a villain to hurt or threaten another character were coded negatively. Some characters' concerns, such as those of the Hardy Boys' Aunt Gertrude or the mother of Elliot in *E.T.—The Extra-Terrestrial*, often went unsaid but were nonetheless included in our tally, since both intentions and actions were included.

The standard for self-sacrificing action in our third question was set much higher than the simple intention to keep someone from harm. Self-sacrifice in this definition is to somehow deprive oneself of something for the sake of another. The gift of food to another person while going hungry oneself is sacrificial, whereas fixing food for someone else is not necessarily so. Many of the characters in our study engaged in polite, generous acts for others but did not sacrifice anything in the doing. For us to classify an act as self-sacrificing, the act had to put a character in danger for the safety of someone else or deprive the character of something that could not be replaced out of the resources that the character had available to him or her. Consequently, incidents of hoarding food or other selfish acts were coded negatively.

Competence/Incompetence

The competence of an individual character was determined by asking three questions regarding his or her abilities and reliability. Those questions and the corresponding variable names are as follows:

1. Did the character solve or partly solve his or her episodic problem? [COMPETENCE]
2. Does the character exhibit personal reliability? [RELIABLE]
3. Does the character accidentally cause harm or damage to objects or other characters? [HARM]

The ability of the characters to solve their problems was graded on a scale of complete failure, partial success, or complete success, with a final option

TABLE 1

Two-Tailed Difference-of-Means Test Comparing Competence of Public Servants with Other Adults

	Public	Non-Public	*t*-value	*N*
		All Adults		
SOLVE	2.17	2.08	0.84	426
HARM	–0.05	–0.06	0.53	865
RELIABLE	0.41	0.35	1.24	865
		Among Males		
SOLVE	2.2	2.17	0.25	328
HARM	–0.06	–0.07	0.33	621
RELIABLE	0.44	0.31	2.53*	621
		Among Females		
SOLVE	2	1.78	0.90	88
HARM	0	–0.06	3.70***	247
RELIABLE	0.09	0.43	–2.99**	247

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

for no well-defined goal. The definition of success here is tightly tied to the goal of the character in question, which is in turn closely linked to the plot of the story. Most characters did not have clearly defined goals. For example, a spectator that observes Wilbur in *Charlotte's Web* may make a comment but have no goal or problem relevant to the story.

Other characters were more involved with the plot yet still had no goals, such as Templeton, the rat in *Charlotte's Web*. Templeton performed several tasks, such as providing words to Charlotte to weave in her web, yet these tasks were in service of the problem to be solved, saving the pig Wilbur. Therefore Templeton was coded as having no defined goals, as his activities were subsumed by the larger problem. In books intended for older children, such as *Charlotte's Web*, the Hardy Boys series, the Nancy Drew series, and *E. T—The Extra-Terrestrial*, longer plots involved more events but not more problems. These events were not treated as separate and discrete, but as part of the overall goal of solving a mystery, saving Wilbur the pig or rescuing E. T. Other cases, such as a criminal who eludes Nancy Drew in several encounters but is captured at the end, were still coded as having failed. The opposite is true in books by Richard Scarry, whose books invariably introduce characters, their respective problem, and the effort to solve them on the very same page.

The SOLVE variable population differs slightly from that of the other variables in that we exclude all cases without a well-defined goal. Without a well-defined problem, there is no opportunity to evaluate the competence of a character. This decreased our sample size by 476 cases.

TABLE 2

Two-Tailed Difference-of-Means Test Comparing Competence of Men with Competence of Women

	Men	Women	*t*-value	*N*
		Regardless of Public Service		
SOLVE	2.087	2.16	–0.74	416
HARM	–.06	–.05	–0.58	868
RELIABLE	0.35	0.40	–1.25	868
		Among Public Servants		
SOLVE	2.35	2.73	–1.77	72
HARM	–.07	0	–2.54**	180
RELIABLE	0.44	–.09	3.31***	180
		Among Non-Public Servants		
SOLVE	2.17	1.78	3.19**	302
HARM	–.07	–0.06	–0.38	688
RELIABLE	0.31	0.42	–2.52*	688

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

The second question of whether the character exhibited personal reliability was answered primarily by the timing of a solution to a problem. If a character was in the nick of time to help another, then that character was coded as reliable. Reliability was also determined through the appearance and habit of neatness. If the Cat in the Hat had not cleaned up after himself, he would be unreliable and receive a negative value. Personal neatness, clean clothing, and such was coded as an indicator of reliability, though a character only had to be either neat or punctual to be coded as reliable, not both. Concerns that this might put the poor at a disadvantage were not supported by the data.

The last question concerning competence considered the potential of accidents as a result of actions by a character. Clumsy, forgetful, or thoughtless characters might harm someone else or damage objects without meaning to, as the *Cat in the Hat* shows:

> "I can hold up the cup and the milk and the cake!
> I can hold up these books and the fish on a rake!
> I can hold the toy ship and a little toy man!
> And look! With my tail I can hold a red fan
> As I hop on the ball! But that is not all.
> Oh, no. That is not all. . . ."
> That is what the cat said. . . .
> Then he fell on his head! (Seuss, 1957:18–21).

If an accident did occur, then the character was coded negatively as potentially harmful. If harm resulted from a lack of information that a character

would not be expected to obtain, then the character was not held responsible, and the incident was coded as a 0.

Results

Our primary research question is to discern whether public servants are portrayed differently than other adults in children's literature. To answer this question, we coded each adult figure for benevolence and competence and then organized the groups along the dimensions of sex and status as a public servant. We computed the mean for each group according to the six criteria of benevolence and competence and performed a two-tailed difference-of-means test. We used the LaVene's test for equality of variances to establish whether the variances of the groups in question were equal.

Competence

Whereas Chilton and Chilton (1993:76) concluded that children's literature portrays public servants as less than competent, we find that they are portrayed no worse than adults who are not public servants. Public servants ($n = 177$) are compared with all other adult characters not employed in the public sector ($n = 688$). The three variables to measure competence are SOLVE, whether the character is able to solve his/her episodic problem; RELIABLE, whether the character displays personal reliability; and finally, HARM, whether characters cause accidental harm or damage. Each table presented here reports the mean and level of significance for the difference of means between groups for these comparison groups. The sample size for each group and comparison group is reported in each table as well.

Surprisingly, although the difference is not significant, the mean scores for public servants are slightly higher than their private-sector counterparts. This supports our original assertion that public servants are portrayed no worse than ordinary adults in children's literature. In short, we find that Chilton and Chilton's (1993) findings regarding negative depictions of bureaucratic competence are premature. Bureaucrats are not portrayed as any less competent than adults in other occupations, as shown in Table 1.

The occupational status of each character did not seem to have much effect in regards to their competence when our cases are separated into groups based on sex. Table 1 shows that among males, the only significant difference among public servants and private citizens is on the RELIABLE variable. This could reflect the general neatness and timeliness shown by law enforcement and other government personnel. Since children are often the problem solvers in this literature, this variable would better reflect the role played by public servants than the SOLVE variable, which was not significantly different. The HARM and RELIABLE variables are significantly different for females, yet this may be more due to the small number of female

TABLE 3

Two-Tailed Difference-of-Means Test Comparing the Benevolence of Public Servants with Other Adults

	Public	Non-Public	*t*-value	*N*
		All Adults		
PROTECT	0.44	0.18	5.22***	865
SOOTHE	0.38	0.30	1.44	865
SACRIFICE	0.23	0.11	2.58**	865
		Among Males		
PROTECT	0.48	0.11	6.76***	621
SOOTHE	0.40	0.25	2.26*	621
SACRIFICE	0.25	0.02	2.53*	621
		Among Females		
PROTECT	–.10	0.33	–2.9**	247
SOOTHE	0.24	0.40	–1.14	247
SACRIFICE	–.05	0.28	–2.82**	247

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

public servants than an indictment of the competence of female bureaucrats and officeholders.

Sex and Competence

Our second research question sought to discern whether there are sex differences in the portrayal of competence of various adult figures in children's literature. Table 2 shows no significant differences between the sexes when no distinction is made based on occupation. We do see a difference between male and female public servants on the HARM and RELIABLE criteria, with men apparently being more accident-prone and women less reliable. In those characters who were not public servants we find a significant difference for the SOLVE variable only. This suggests that male private citizens are much more likely to succeed in solving their problems than female citizens. The RELIABLE variable, by contrast, continues to be significantly in favor of females when only private citizens are considered.

Benevolence

Chilton and Chilton (1993) find that public-sector employees are portrayed as less benevolent than their counterparts employed in the private sector. We find instead that public-sector employees are never portrayed as less benevolent than private citizens and are frequently portrayed as more benevolent. We use three variables, reported in Table 3, to measure be-

TABLE 4

Two-Tailed Difference-of-Means Test Comparing Benevolence of Men with Benevolence of Women

	Men	Women	*t*-value	*N*
		Regardless of Public Service		
PROTECT	0.20	0.31	–2.26*	868
SOOTHE	0.29	0.39	–1.85	868
SACRIFICE	–.08	0.26	–2.80**	868
		Among Public Servants		
PROTECT	0.48	–.10	4.77***	180
SOOTHE	0.40	0.24	1.08*	180
SACRIFICE	0.25	–.05	3.13**	180
		Among Non-Public Servants		
PROTECT	0.02	0.33	–4.24***	688
SOOTHE	0.25	0.40	–2.54*	688
SACRIFICE	–.02	0.28	–3.65***	688

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

nevolence: the frequency with which the character desires to, or actually does, protect some other character (PROTECT), the frequency with which the character engages in self-sacrificing behavior (SACRIFICE), and whether the character displays soothing, reassuring, or comforting speech, mannerisms, or gestures toward another character (SOOTHE).

We find that public servants score significantly higher on the PROTECT and SACRIFICE variables, whereas the SOOTHE variable does not show significant differences between the groups. Once again, it appears that bureaucrats are not poorly portrayed, comparatively speaking. In fact, they are often portrayed as slightly more benevolent than other adults.

Sex and Benevolence

Not surprisingly, we find that women in general are portrayed as more benevolent than males, as evidenced by Table 4. Women score higher on measures regarding the desire to protect and sacrifice for others, with significantly higher scores than men for the PROTECT and SACRIFICE variables. Interestingly, we find no significant differences between the sexes in the number of attempts to comfort others (SOOTHE). Among public-sector employees, though, males are portrayed as more benevolent than females, reversing the trend seen when comparing all females to all males. PROTECT and SACRIFICE display significantly higher scores for men than women, whereas SOOTHE once again shows no significant differences. In short, differences are found within the private citizenry, with fe-

male non–public servants depicted as more benevolent than men according to all three measures.

We examined whether public-service status has an effect within each sex as well. We find that males in the public service are portrayed as more benevolent than all other adult males, scoring significantly higher on all three measures. Women display the opposite trend, displaying significantly higher scores of benevolence for private citizens over public servants. This difference most likely results from the type and number of public-service opportunities given to women within our sample. In the children's literature we examined, women are not police officers or firefighters but are relegated entirely to the traditional roles of queens, princesses, or teachers, with the traditional role of teacher being given to only 5 of 247 total female characters.

In sum, addressing depictions of all adults or all public servants in children's literature does not capture the entire story. Each sex is portrayed differently in children's literature. Women in general are portrayed as more benevolent than men, whereas men are portrayed as more reliable and better able to solve problems. These findings show that children's literature largely reflects stereotypes held by the population at large regarding traditional roles and attributes of men and women. Interestingly, these differences largely disappear when one takes into account public service.

Age of Intended Audience

Children of different ages respond to stimuli in different ways. It has been suggested that editors and authors of children's books understand this and thus tailor the content of their books to each audience. As a result, we coded each book for difficulty level, essentially a proxy for age of intended audience. To code for difficulty level, we used the Fry formula for estimating readability (Fry, 1978). This formula takes into account the difficulty of vocabulary and the complexity of the grammar used throughout the book and is reported for most books in the biannual volumes of the *Elementary School Library Collection* (Winkel, 1973–2000). When possible, we used the difficulty level reported in that volume; however, no difficulty level was reported for 35 of the books we used in the study. For these books, an expert in the field of children's literature was consulted and instructed to indicate which age level would be the most appropriate audience for each book. The difficulty levels were then recorded and collapsed into three categories: 1 = first grade and below; 2 = second grade to fourth grade; 3 = fifth grade and above. The sample of books is distributed normally amongst these three categories, with a mean score of 2.2.

We found a significant value for the overall multivariate analysis of variance (Wilks' lambda = 11.34). This suggests that books intended for older audiences tend to treat all adults, regardless of status as a public servant, more critically than books aimed at younger audiences. By examining the

effect of age of intended audience on each variable, we see that age of intended audience has a significant effect on four of the individual variables to the .05 level: SOOTHE ($F = 8.72$), PROTECT ($F = 3.68$), SACRIFICE ($F = 6.35$), and RELIABLE ($F = 44.33$). Simply stated, the older the age of intended audience gets, the more likely the book is to take a more critical view of adult characters on each of the aforementioned variables.

Conclusion

Our research has produced four key findings. First, we agree with Chilton and Chilton (1993) that public servants are frequently portrayed in children's literature. Second, we find that those that work in the public service are portrayed as no more incompetent than adults who work in other occupations. Third, we find that public servants are not portrayed as more malevolent than other adults. In fact, we find the opposite on several dimensions. This suggests that if children are developing negative stereotypes of government officials and institutions, as Chilton and Chilton suggest, these stereotypes do not appear to be formed through their reading of children's literature. Fourth, we discover that women in general are portrayed as more benevolent than men, although the same patterns are not found between the sexes when examining only those characters in public service.

We believe that this study has provided a needed answer to the question of how public servants are portrayed in children's literature. Although depiction in children's literature does not imply a hypodermic needle effect, what children read obviously plays a role in their socialization. The exact nature of this relationship needs to be established as scholars attempt to track the path from representation to understanding. Nonetheless, understanding the images and stereotypes portrayed in children's literature is to take another necessary step toward understanding how children form early political attitudes.

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APPENDIX

List of Variables

OCCUPATION: 1 = public servant, 0 = adult, not public servant.

SOOTHE: Does the character display soothing, reassuring, or comforting speech, mannerisms, or gestures toward another character? 1 = yes, 0 = no, −1 = deliberately upsets other character.

PROTECT: How often does the character desire to, or actually does, protect some other character? 1 = displays desire or act to protect, 0 = displays neither desire or action, −1 = displays actions that do expose or desires to expose another character to danger.

SACRIFICE:	How often does the character engage in self-sacrificing behavior?
SOLVE:	How would you define the ability of the character to solve his/her episodic problem? 3 = the character completely succeeds, 2 = the character partly succeeds, 1 = the character completely fails, 0 = there is no well-defined goal.
RELIABLE:	Does the character display personal reliability? 1 = displays tidiness, punctuality, or timeliness, 0 = no incidents concerning tidiness or punctuality, −1 = is late or is untidy.
HARM:	Does the character accidentally cause harm or damage either to objects or other persons? −1 = yes, 0 = no, 1 = the character explicitly avoids accidents.