



"Hairspray? I
don't
understand...."
Gender
Representation
in Graded
Readers

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Extensive Reading & Graded Readers





Reading a lot of easy, interesting books.

1. The reading material is easy.
2. A variety of reading material on a wide range of topics must be available.
3. Learners choose what they want to read.
4. Learners read as much as possible.
5. The purpose of reading is usually related to pleasure, information and general understanding.
6. Reading is its own reward.
7. Reading speed is usually faster rather than slower.
8. Reading is individual and silent.
9. Teachers orient and guide their students.
10. The teacher is a model of a reader.

(Day and Bamford, 1998, 2002)

Core Elements

1. Fluent, sustained comprehension of text as a meaning-focused input
2. Large volume of material
3. Reading over extended periods of time
4. Texts are longer, requiring comprehension at the discourse level

Waring and McLean (2015)

*Fourteen Publishers

*Fifty Four Series

*Over Two Thousand Titles

Hill (2013)

But are
they any
good?



A Starting Point

Gender Representations in ELT Textbooks

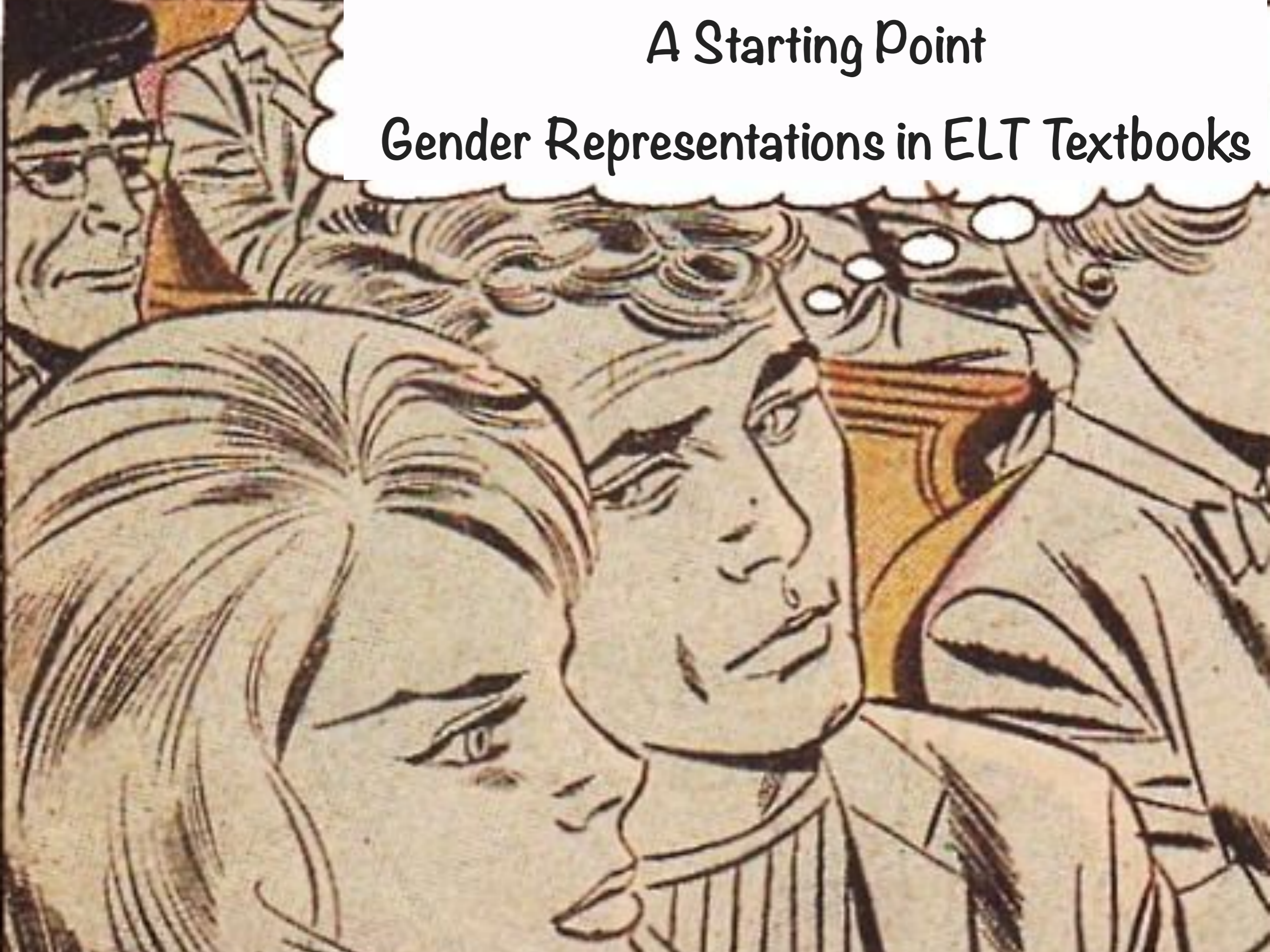


Image Analysis

1. What is the activity of the image(s)?
2. Who is active (the "protagonist") in the image?
3. Who is passive (the "receiver") in the image(s)?
4. Who has status in the image(s)?
5. What does the body language communicate?
6. What does the clothing communicate?
7. Where are the eyes directed?

(Giaschi, 2000; Levine & O'Sullivan, 2010)

Verbal Analysis

1. Speaking time and linguistic diversity

2. Dialogue participation

3. Word selection, including usage of names, titles and verbs

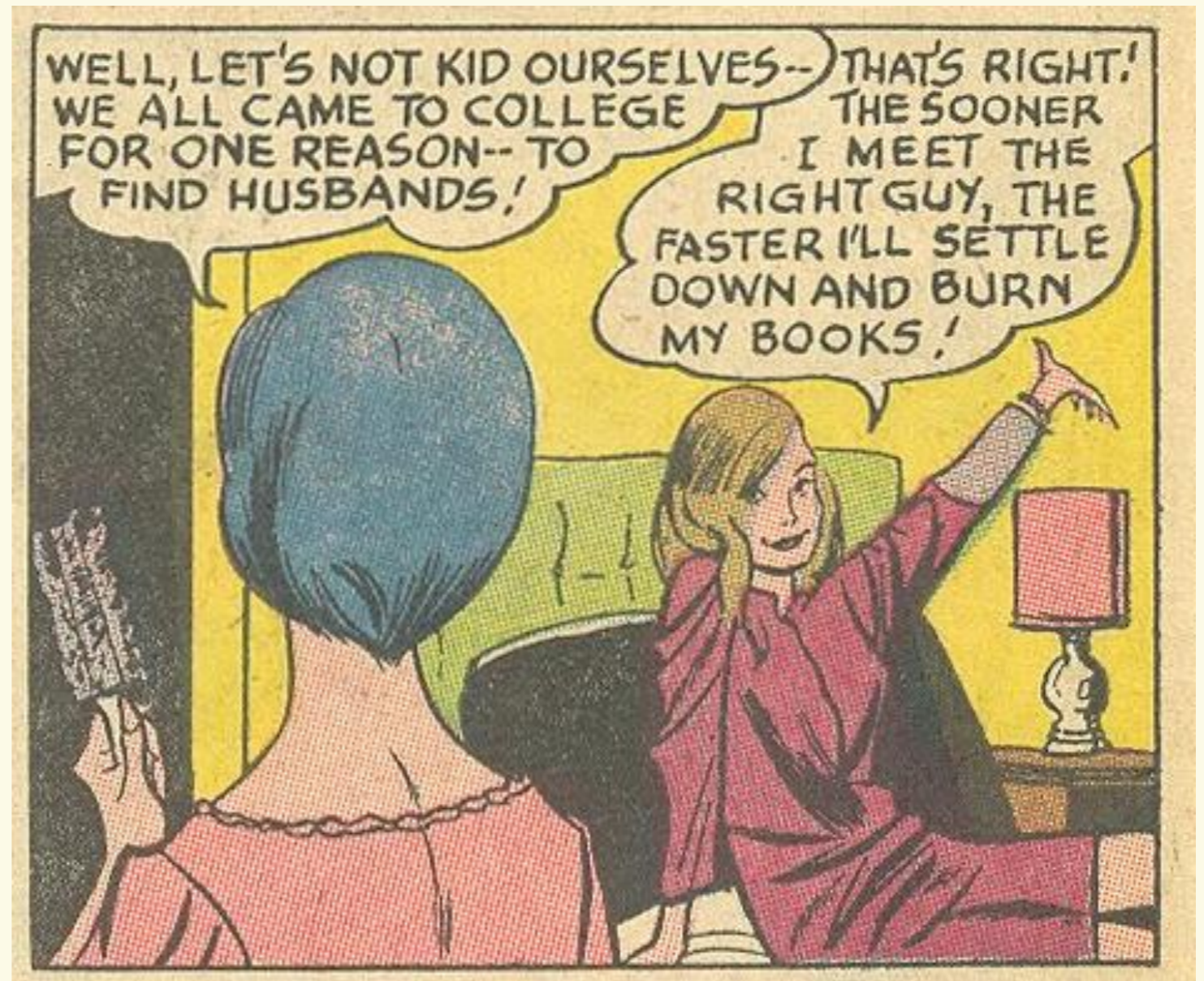
4. Choice of dialogue topics

5. Gender firstness of dialogues

6. Gender firstness of dialogues

(Svien, 2016)

A graded
reader is
not a
textbook



*One course book for
one course

*Teacher selected

*Group / class activity

*Varied genres /
narratives within one
book

*Many graded readers
for one course

*Student selected

*Individual activity

*Single genre /
narrative within one
book

*Bechdel Test

*Gender of Protagonist

*Named Characters

*Gender / Occupation

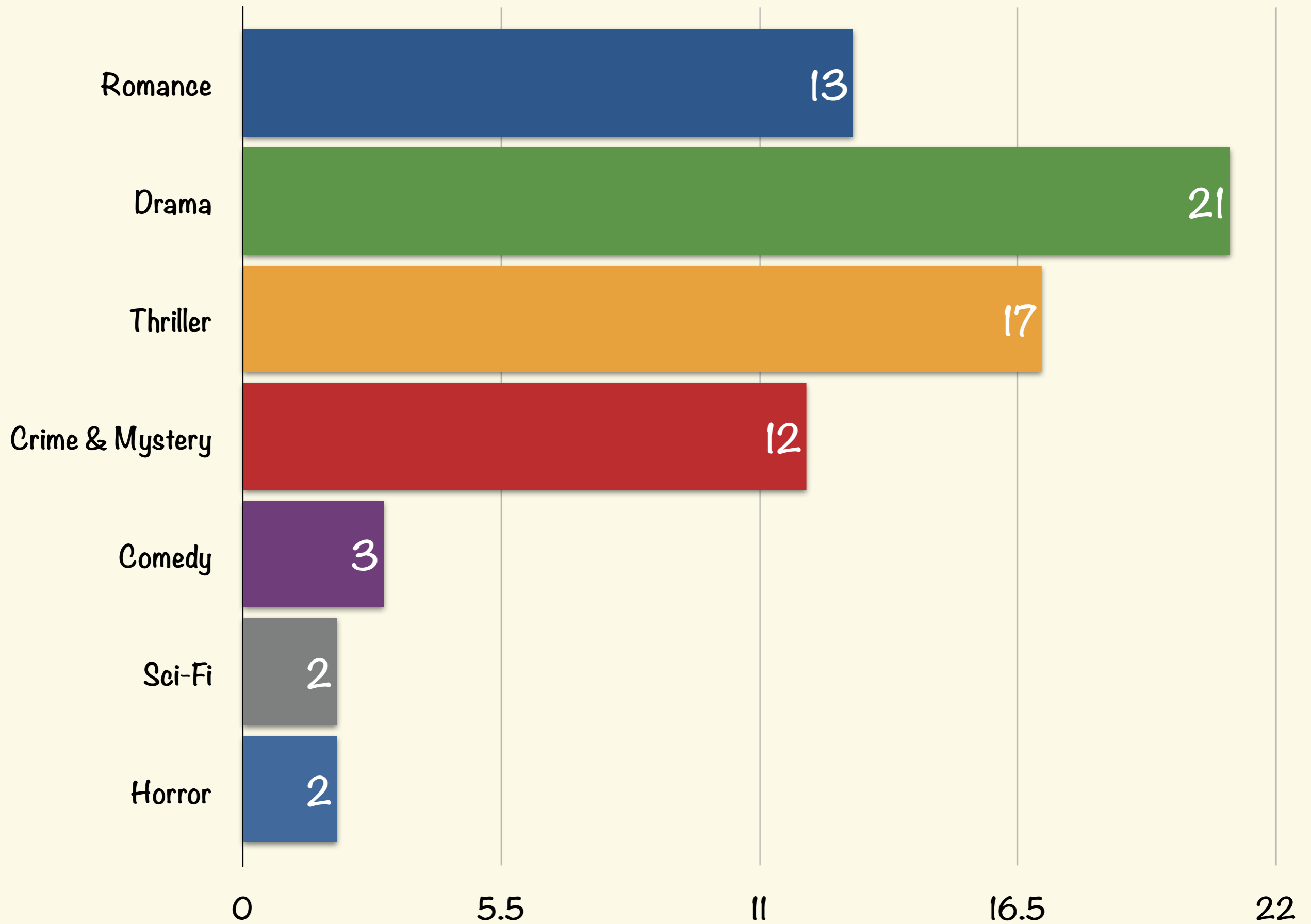
*Seventy books

*Four Publishers

*200-400 Headword Level

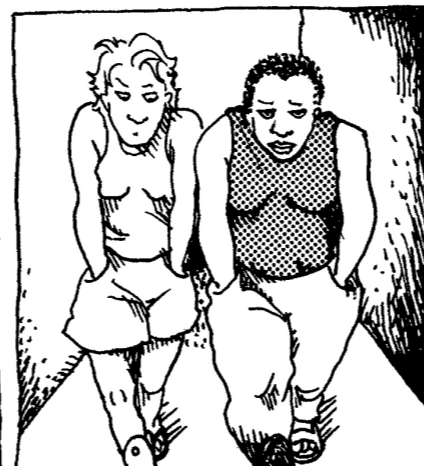
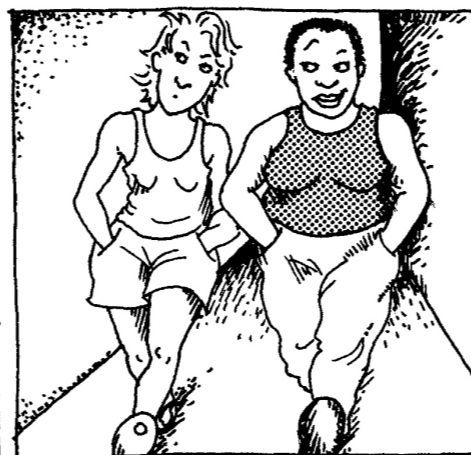
*0.8 - 2.0 Yomiyasusa Level

- Original Stories
- No Movie Tie-ins
- No Adapted Novels
- No 'Classics'



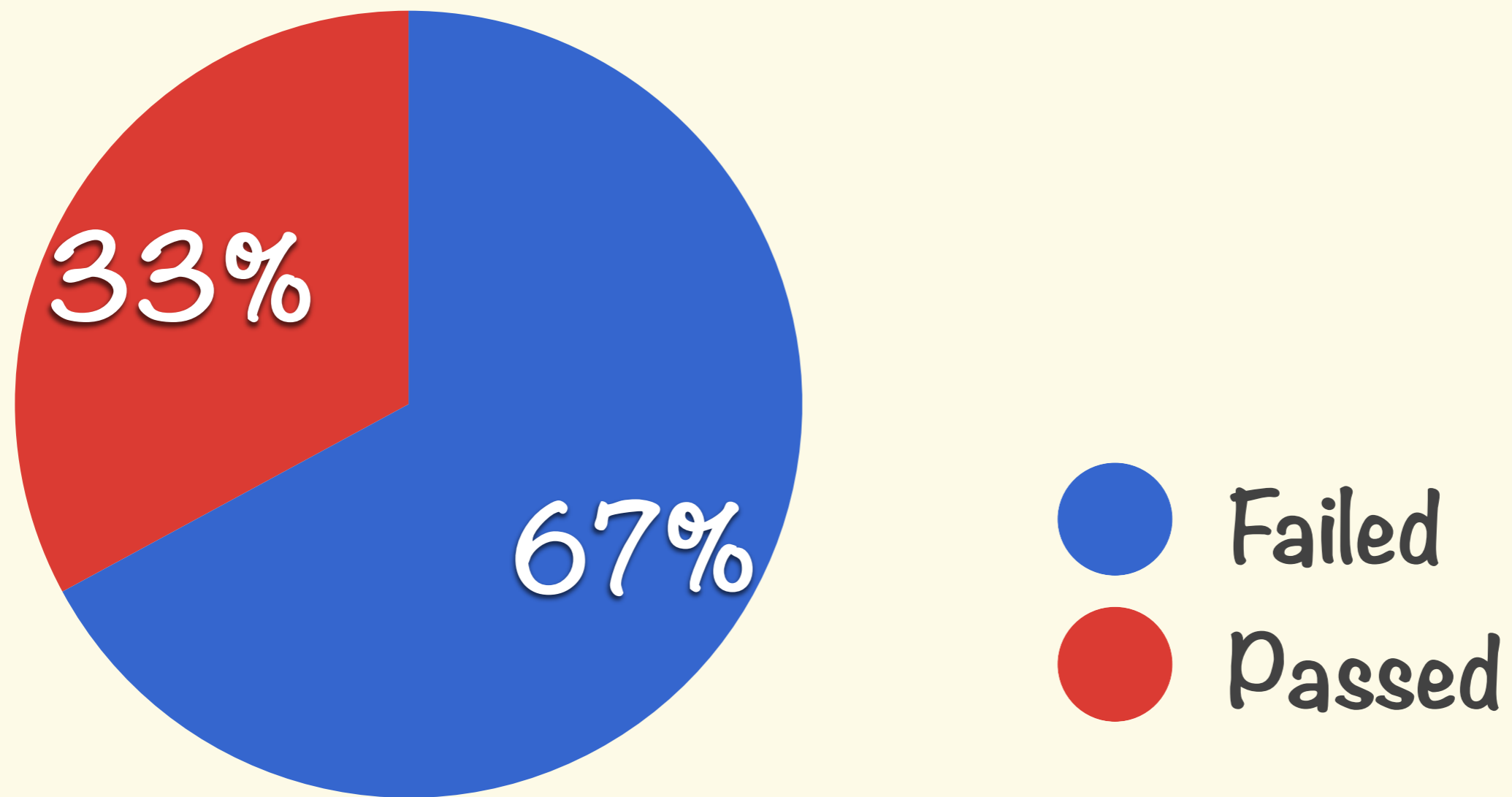
Bechdel Test

Bye to Watch Out For
PRESENTS
THE RULE
WITH THANKS TO LIZ WALLACE

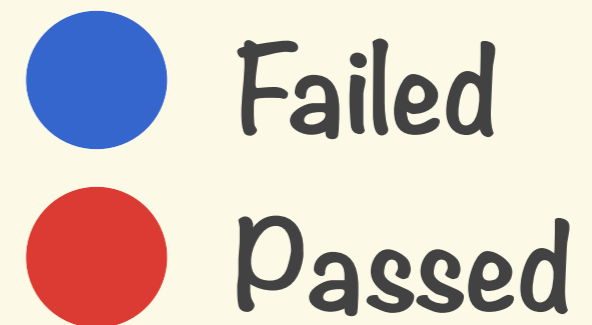
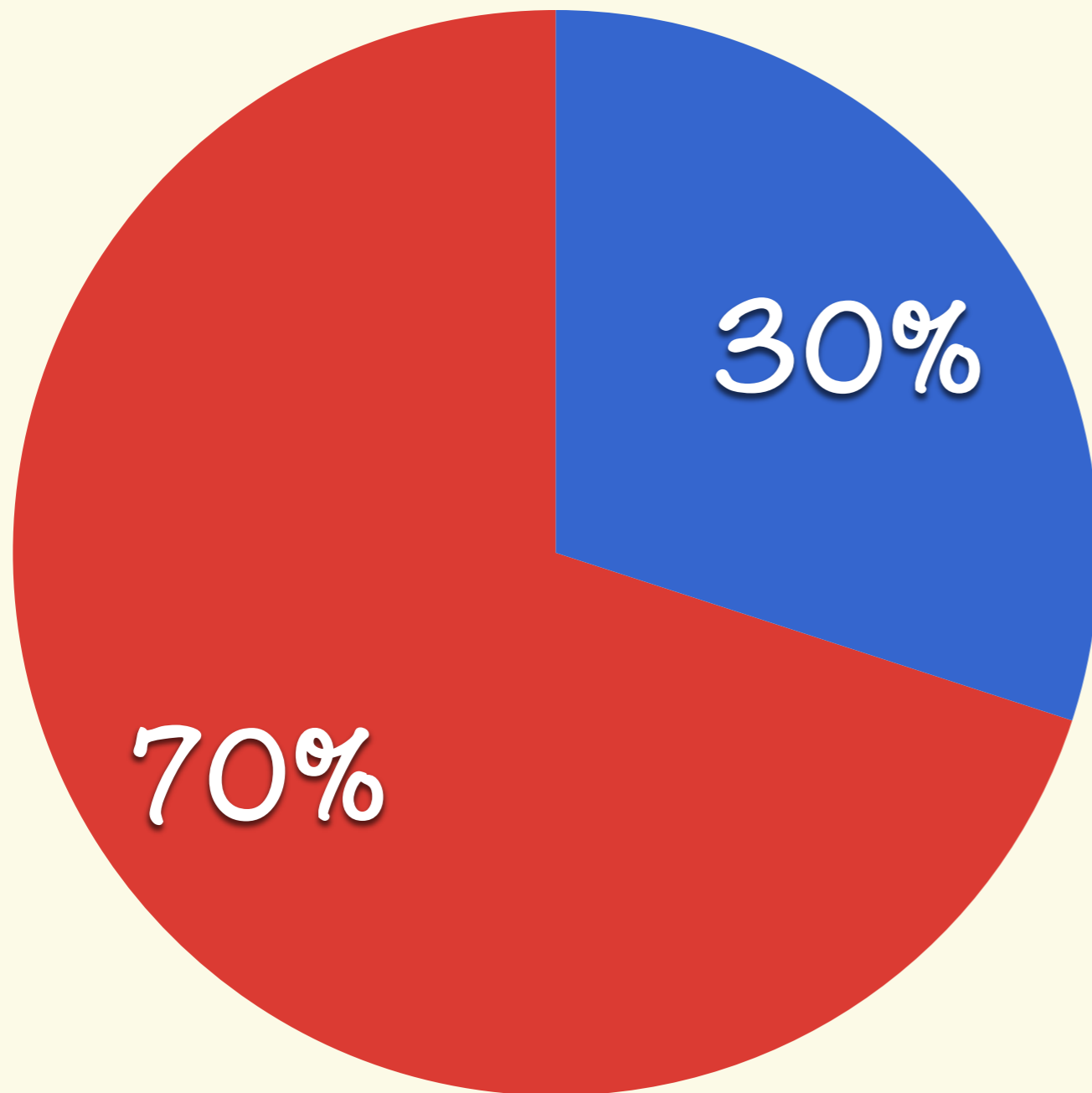


Bechdel Test

(n=70)



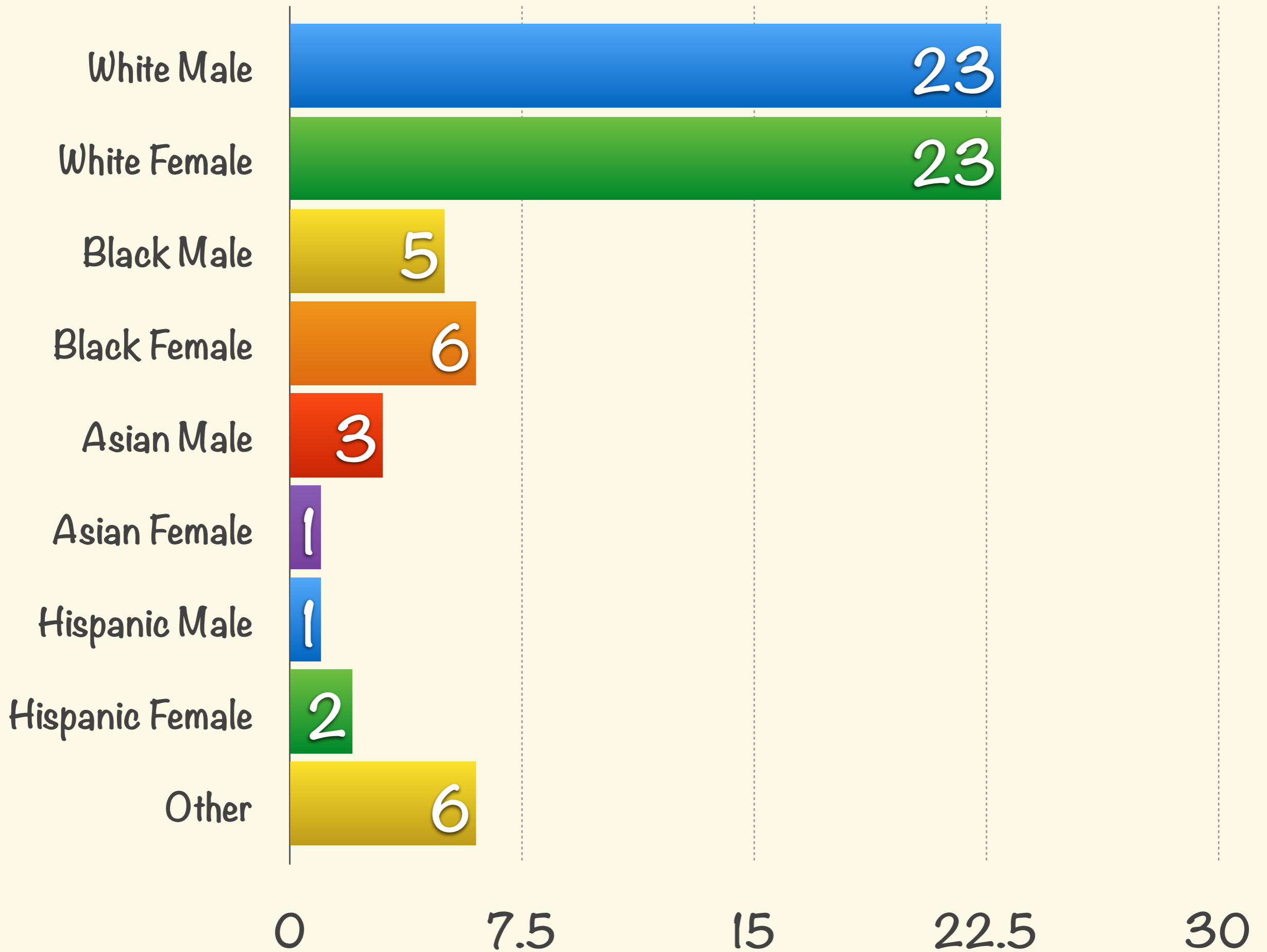
'Reverse' Bechdel Test (n=70)



- *The number of characters tends to be limited
- *Many of the dialogues are very short



Gender of Protagonist



- * Characters who drive the story, and with whom we are invited to empathise, are as likely to be female as male
- * However, there are far fewer protagonists of colour than white lead characters
- * Thinking about my own teaching context, I am particularly bothered by the lack of Asian female protagonists.
- * Problematic to assess race / ethnicity from names and illustrations

Named Characters

BUT IN REALITY...

YOU'LL NEVER EVEN KNOW MY NAME BECAUSE I'M TOO FRIGHTENED TO EVEN SAY A SIMPLE HELLO!



- Not included as 'named characters';
- * Characters who are referred to by their relationship to another character (e.g. 'mum')
 - * Characters who are referred to by their job title or position (e.g. 'the teacher')

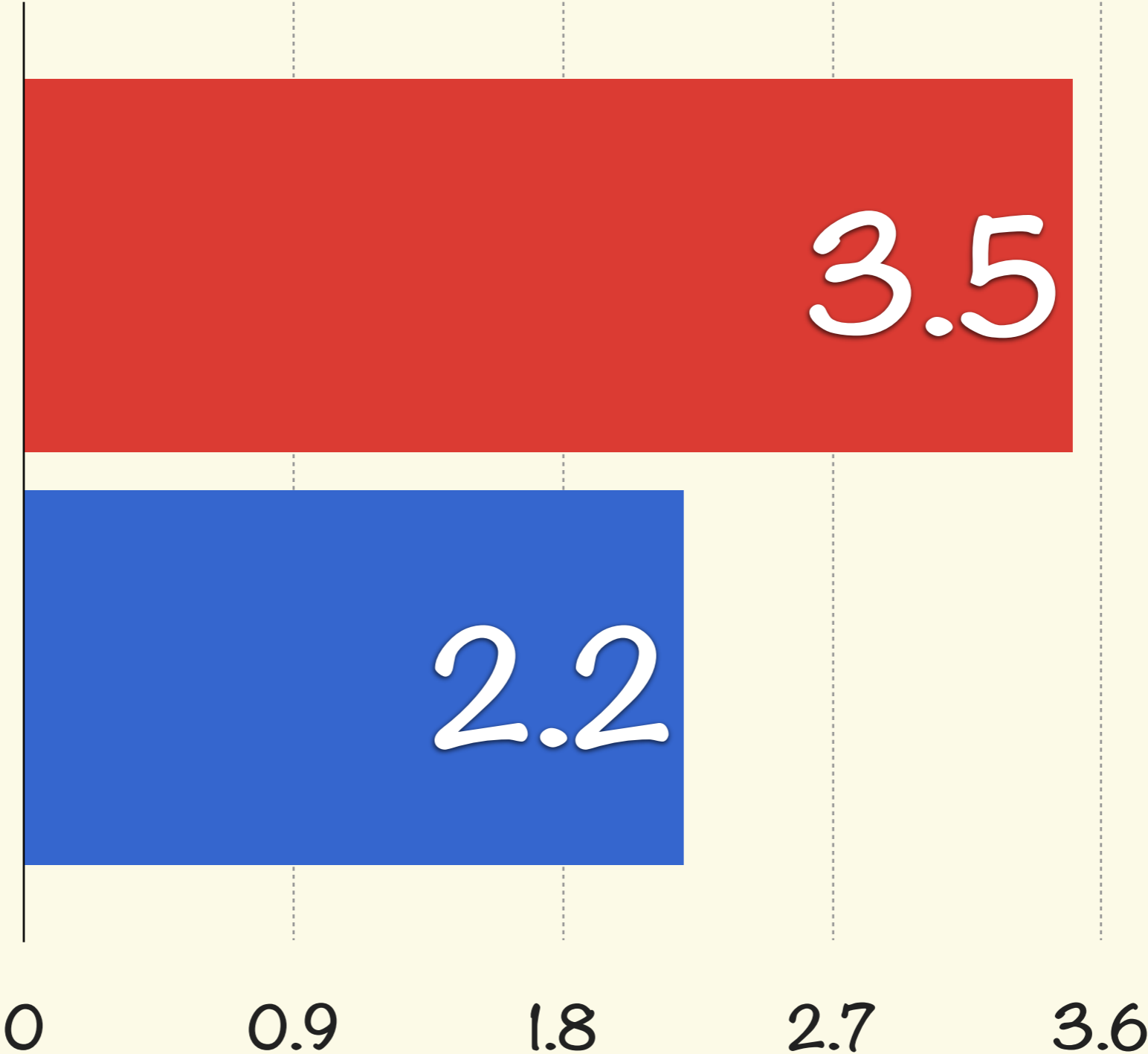
Named Characters

Male

3.5

Female

2.2



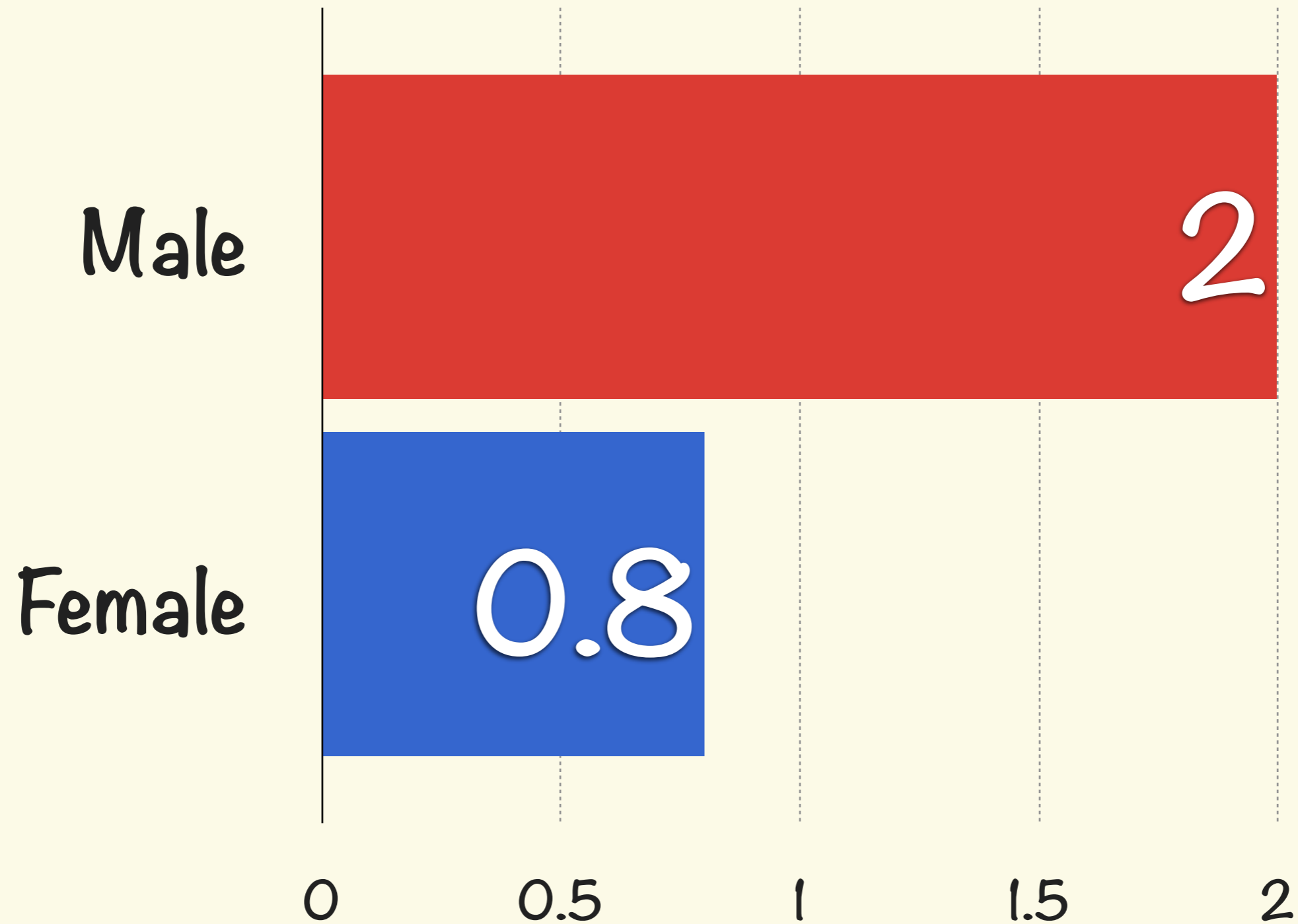
Gender / Occupation

*Named or unnamed

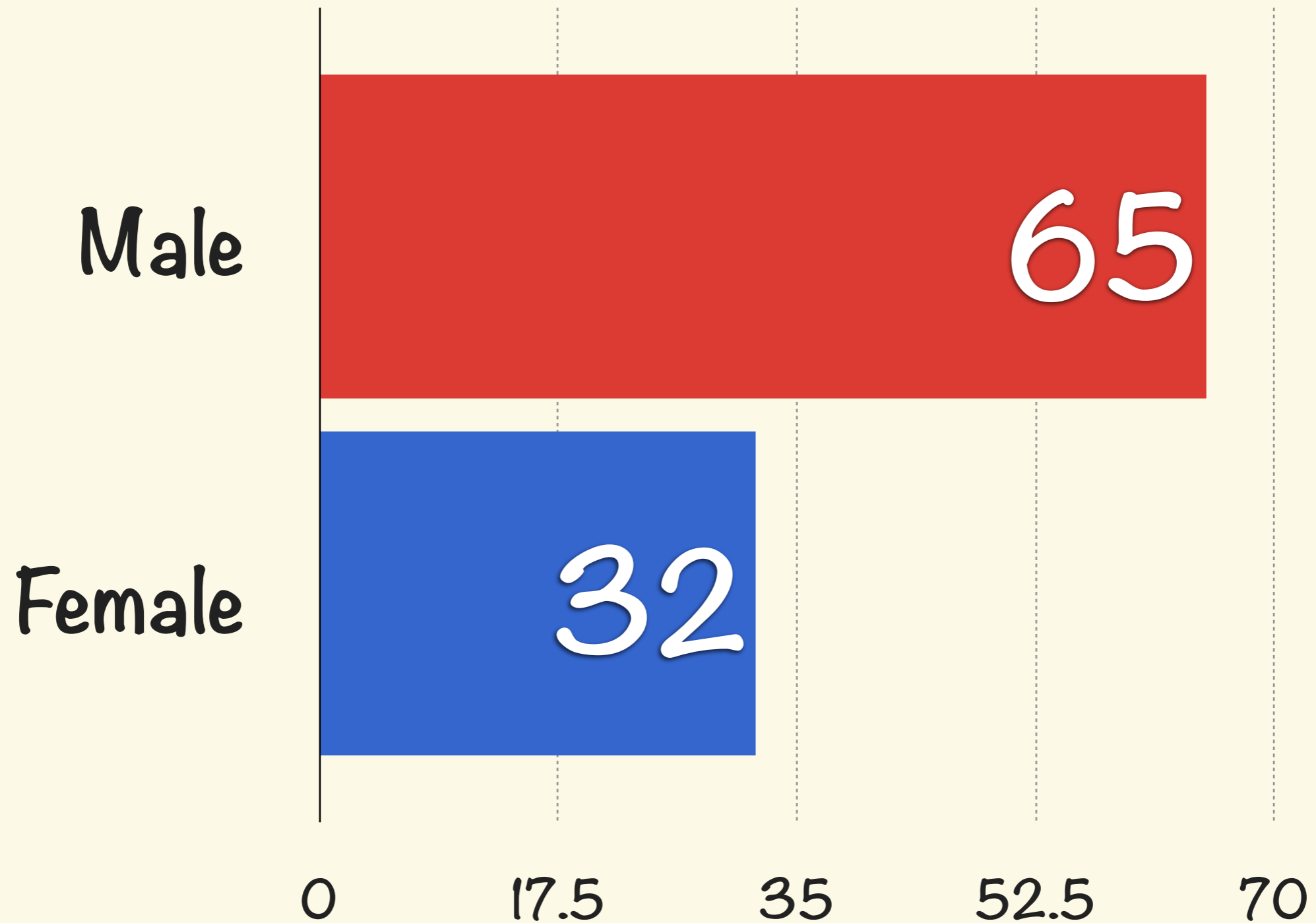
*With or without dialogue

*Represented in the text, the
illustrations or both

Characters Represented Working Outside the Home



Number of Distinct Occupations Represented



* If criminal occupations were included (e.g. assassin, con man) the male total would be higher still

* Women were depicted performing household chores far more frequently than men

1. Police Officer (20)
2. Private Investigator /
Detective (9)
3. Doctor (6)
4. Soldier (5)
5. Writer, Office Worker,
Hotel Porter (4)

1. Police Officer (6)
2. Doctor, Actor (5)
3. Private Investigator /
Detective (4)
4. Singer, Reporter (3)
5. Teacher, Lawyer, Nurse,
Artist (2)

Recommendations

- * There appears to be an imbalance in gender representation in graded readers
- * Further work needs to be done to compare publishers, series and levels

- * Publishers need to consider the series as a whole when commissioning new works
- * Particular attention should be paid to the illustrations
- * Teachers also need to consider balance in their role as 'reading guiders' (curation)

Thank you for listening

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