THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

The ACSI and Common Core:
Gender Representation in Literature Curriculum and the Impact of
Evangelical Christianity

By

Greta Moons

August 2024

A paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Master of Arts degree in the Master of Arts Program in the Social Sciences

Faculty Advisor: Karlyn Gorski
Preceptor: Maximilian Cuddy

Abstract

Book ban attempts are increasingly happening in United States schools, as people frequently associated with the Christian Right try to limit students' access to diverse and representative literature that they perceive as dangerous and contradictory to their beliefs (Pickering, 2023; Miller et al., 2023). Even without these efforts, the literary canon is already primarily white and male, with one study of classroom libraries finding almost twice as many depictions of male characters as female characters (Crisp et al., 2016). Given that representation in literature can be helpful to the self-efficacy of minority or marginalized students, the combination of the biased literary canon and censorship attempts presents a significant problem for United States education (Gurin et al., 2008). Christian schools provide a key site of investigation for this issue, not only due to the connection between the Christian Right and book ban attempts, but also because there are around four million students who attend Christian-affiliated schools in the United States (NCES). The correlation between Christian nationalism, which has strong ties to Evangelical Christianity, and gender traditionalism would seem to lead to Christian schools having less representative literature that is more in line with traditional gender roles, but this has not been verified in prior research (Whitehead & Perry, 2019). This research seeks to illuminate in what ways Christian and public school literature curricula differ in regards to gender representation, address what this difference means for the values and gender ideals that they promote, and understand if Christian schools actually demonstrate less representation in literature based on the promotion of gender traditionalism within Christianity. I will do this by analyzing the gender representation in literature curriculum and recommendations for grades nine and ten from the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) and the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) by looking at authorship, characters, and content. Additionally, documents from these education systems, including expected student outcomes, statements of faith, and standards, will be analyzed through comparative qualitative coding in order to contextualize the curricular content within the portrayed beliefs of the systems regarding education and its purpose. Results show slightly more representation of female authorship in the CCSS exemplars in comparison the the ACSI recommended curriculum and significantly more female characters within the CCSS exemplars, as well as finding a focus on academics and career as outcomes in the CCSS's documents in comparison to a focus on religiosity and values within the ACSI.

1. Introduction

Gender representation in school curriculum is of key importance as it plays a role in socializing students' gender presentation as well as exposing students to different ways that gender can be expressed. However, especially within the literary canon, much of what is presented as valuable has been historically white and male, leaving books written by or about women and people of color unrepresented, with one study of classroom libraries finding almost twice as many depictions of male characters as female characters (Crisp et al., 2016). Especially given the impact that diverse representation in literature can have on helping people be more open to other perspectives, lack of diversity within the literary canon, and thus in school curricula, complicates efforts towards improvement and damages marginalized students (Gurin et al., 2008). Due to a record number of book challenges and bans in 2022, particularly those targeting books about marginalized identities, children's access to diverse representation in schools and libraries is shrinking (Pickering, 2023). Book banning is exacerbating marginalized students' lack of representation within American public education, and possibly Christian education as well.

The impact of the Christian Right has become especially prominent in states such as Florida, alongside a rise in the rhetoric used by those who support Trump as a political figure (Baker et al., 2020). Education, which has a history of being been a site for ideological challenges and the promotion of traditional values, is once again being used for this purpose by the Christian Right. They are attempting to remove any curriculum content that challenges or provides alternative views to their beliefs from public education. Christian schools within the United States provide an important site of investigation for gender representation in literature due not only to the connection to gender

traditionalism, but also due to their connections to the Christian Right groups that seek to ban books in public schools. Additionally, they include a large number of students, with the National Center for Education Statistics reporting around four million students attending Christian affiliated schools of various denominations according to a 2019 to 2020 study (NCES). Within this group, Evangelical Christian affiliate schools are of specific interest due to their identification with the version of Christianity most tied to Christian nationalism (Whitehead & Perry, 2019). Christianity, especially Evangelical Christianity, is positively correlated with beliefs about gender traditionalism and authoritarianism (Whitehead & Perry, 2019), which may connect to less representation of women in literature in Christian-affiliated schools. Thus, as Christian nationalism increases, the concern for gender representation becomes increasingly relevant (Baker et al., 2020). There are also widespread attempts to ban certain books and ideologies from public schools based on the presence of racial and LGBTQ content, which are traditionally opposed by white Evangelical Christianity. With this in mind, the content of curriculum and what perspective it promotes is of key importance to modern United States education.

Taking into account not only the importance of gender representation within literature curriculum, but also the association of traditional gender roles with Christianity, what does this mean for gender representation in Christian schools? Are they serving as a haven for traditional gender roles in literature with public schools moving on towards better representation? Alternatively, are Christian views woven into American society and supported by book banning attempts maintaining the lack of representation within public schools? By looking at the gender representation within Christian and public school English literature curricula, as well as the stated goals behind the curricular content, new

information about the nature of the impact of Christian values on the gender representation that is presented in Christian schools is revealed. Although representation in public and Christian curricula has been studied previously, primarily focusing on race (Scaramanga & Reiss, 2018), the way in which gender is presented in Christian school literature has not, providing space for more research to reveal how religion impacts its inclusion. Essentially, this research seeks to illuminate how Christian and public school literature curricula differ in regard to gender representation, if these differences reflect the values proposed by those behind book ban attempts, and ultimately reflect on what these results might mean regarding the nature of Evangelical Christian education within the United States.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Representation in Literary Canon and Curriculum

The western literary canon is heavily white and male, focusing on the European values and ideologies that it promotes. One study of the contents of in-class libraries in the United States found that there were more than twice as many books written by male authors than female authors (Crisp et al., 2016). The nature of the literary canon has been addressed in literary theory, not least of which by prominent writer and literary critic Toni Morrison. In one piece of literary theory in which she addressed the canon, she writes that "canon building is empire building," describing how the literature that is valued by a society shapes the society itself (Morrison, 1989, p. 374). Corse and Griffin, in a piece addressing cultural valorization within the canon, address the idea that the canon itself is viewed as natural and simply a collection of the objectively best literature, rather than something socially constructed (1997). This perspective on the canon obscures other reasons behind canon content, making gaps in the canon regarding diversity less obvious while also justifying them, which prevents

more literature by female authors from being placed into curricula as they are not considered classics or part of the canon. Although both Morrison (1989) and Corse and Griffin (1997) focus on ideas of race, much of their argumentation is coded with the idea of a dominant view over a subordinate view, allowing it to also be applied to the disproportionate gender representation within the literary canon as well. By not having diverse gender representation in literature curricula, the perspective that is being portrayed as worthy and good is that of men, thus contributing to the construction and reinforcement of a society and institutions that bolster the power and influence of men over women.

Apple's 1995 work, *Education and Power*, addresses how education can be used as a tool for cultural valorization and empire building. It argues that by determining what knowledge is viewed as important within a given society, education, particularly curricula and their content, can shape people's worldviews and reinforce power structures (Apple, 1995). He writes, in addressing curriculum's impact, that "the way the curriculum was organized, the principles upon which it was built and evaluated, and, finally, the very knowledge itself, all of these were critically important if we were to understand how [economic and cultural] power was reproduced" (Apple, 1995, p. 19). This aligns with Morrison's writing, as they both – using the different perspectives of literary theory and sociology – see the power of education or the literary canon as a means of maintaining a specific worldview and corresponding practices. For the Christian Right, then, education and literature can be seen as a battleground for their values and way of life, as much of how people act and what they believe is rooted in what they learn in their formal education. Thus, by reducing female representation and limiting it to women in traditional gender roles, they would be not only legitimating those roles, but also Evangelical Christianity as a broader belief system.

Literature curriculum has been shown to be of particular importance in regards to its impact on identity formation. Recent studies have shown that literature can be an excellent way to incorporate critical thought within K-12 spaces as it provides the opportunity to read work that challenges social structures and empowers girls and other minorities (Boehm et al., 2021; Gurin et al., 2008). A concrete example of implementing gender non-comforming literature for young children is seen in Staley's 2023 work on queer-inclusive teaching. She describes a teacher guiding students through book that presents the wedding of two gender non-conforming worms, provides the young students with the opportunity to interact with non-traditional depictions of gender, allowing for those ideas to be normalized rather than simply reinforcing binary ideas of gender and traditional gender roles (Staley, 2023). Removing existing representative literature, such as this, can also be detrimental to students. Pickering (2023) states that it is likely that the removal of texts due to book bans will disproportionately impact minority or marginalized students, likely making them more susceptible to mental health issues. Literary representation provides social support through allowing students to see themselves within the books they are assigned, so removing the literature also removes the social support it provides (Pickering, 2023). With this in mind, gender representation in literature is highly important in public education, but perhaps is even more crucial within Christian education systems given the gender roles that are reinforced within the belief system, which will be discussed later. In light of the impact representation and curricular content have on socialization and validating ideologies, as described by that Apple (1995) and Morrison (1989), presenting diversity in literature allows for students not only to see themselves and their perspectives as important, but also creates opportunity for different perspectives on the world to be shared instead of simply promoting a dominant ideology.

Existing research shows continued and prevalent disproportionate representation not only in the United States, but globally, with there being significantly more instances of male representation in comparison to female representation (Amini & Birjandi, 2012; Cassese & Bos, 2013; Gomez-Najarro, 2020; Phan & Pham, 2021). This includes studies of gender representation in English language learning textbooks in Iran and Vietnam showing that the images or content not only include portrayals of men significantly more frequently than those of women, but also often restrict portrayals of women to traditionally feminine gender roles (Amini & Birjandi, 2012; Phan & Pham, 2021). These pieces focus the male versus female representation for the different careers that are portrayed in the books, addressing the frequency of those presentations within the texts (Amini & Birjandi, 2012; Phan & Pham, 2021). Gomez-Najarro (2020), within a United States context, found when looking at Common Core State Standards' (CCSS) text exemplars for grades two and three that there was very little diversity in representation based on categories of race, gender, and class. She found that, of the 20 books studied, there were only three female main characters and three main characters who were people of color (Gomez-Najarro, 2020). Only one book actually presented an instance of intersecting marginalized identities with a lower class black boy being featured (Gomez-Najarro, 2020). As this research will also be using CCSS text exemplars, Gomez-Najarro's findings provide key insight into the topic, but nevertheless only address elementary curriculum, and thus do not fully illuminate the state of CCSS for older students for whom a more traditional literary canon would be expected.

Regarding research on the current content of Christian curriculum specifically, one study by Scaramanga and Reiss (2018) found a popular Christian curriculum to not only lack diverse racial representation, but to actively portray people of color negatively. They found that there was

disproportionate underrepresentation of people of color, a portrayal of white and middle-class ways of life as correct, and use of insensitive language for a variety of marginalized racial groups (Scaramanga & Reiss, 2018). This lack of diversity could be a sign that gender representation may also be lacking, but that was not addressed in this study (Scaramanga & Reiss, 2018). Additionally, they noted that those in charge of the curriculum and the school that used it actively denied the lack of representation and the racist content within it (Scaramanga & Reiss, 2018). This provides strong reasoning to address what the ACSI and the CCSS say about the content of their curriculum in order to provide context for if their recommended literature aligns with the values they promote and if there are any mentions of either diversity or gender traditionalism as goals for the students.

2.2 Christianity and Gender

Regarding Christian views on gender roles, recent survey research has shown correlations between various versions of Christianity with gender traditionalism. Whitehead and Perry's analysis of the Values and Beliefs of the American Public Survey found a correlation between Christian nationalism and gender traditionalism across all categories of Christianity surveyed, with especially high traditionalism rates for protestant evangelicals, as well as correlation with gender traditionalism even for those who were only ambivalent to Christian nationalism (2019). They theorize that this is connected to shared traditional and authoritarian values and moral beliefs that support both Christianity and gender traditionalism (Whitehead & Perry, 2019). Although Christian nationalism is not representative of all Christianity, Evangelical Protestantism is specifically correlated with both Christian nationalism and gender traditionalism, and is the denomination that the ACSI identifies with (Whitehead & Perry, 2019). Burke, Juzwik, and Prins (2023), even argue that it is white Christian

nationalists who are behind many of the book ban attempts and the active criticism of public

education content that is happening currently. Beyond this, there is also historical precedence not only

for gendered thought within Christianity and Christian schools, but also connections to curricula

challenges (Dowland, 2015), meaning that current education challenges are likely a continuation of

previous movements simply with a new target.

These views on gender can also be seen in the activism of the Christian Right, not only in the

messages that have proliferated about what role women should hold in the family, but also the issues in

which women were allowed to take part. James Dobson, a popular Evangelical Christian speaker and

writer on issues of the family, encourages traditional gender roles and has reinforced patriarchal views

within the Christian Right community (Stephens, 2019). From his perspective, women should only be

in the workforce as a "last resort," as women raising children is, in his own words, "the most noble

occupation in the universe" (Stephens, 2019, p. 57). These beliefs reflect the results of Whitehead and

Perry's (2019) work, showing how they have been discussed within the Christian Right movement.

Regarding women in the Christian Right, Johnson (2019) addresses the roles that women have been

allowed to play within the movement as being limited to issues that are viewed as more feminine and

speaking and writing for female audiences by looking at historical examples of specific women in the

movement. Multiple female advocates are reported to have encouraged female submission in the home

and state that they feel guilty when they do not feel they have been fully submissive (Johnson, 2019).

This includes, but is not limited to, both Marabel Morgan and Anita Bryant, who were active writers

for Christian female audiences, advocating for traditional family structure and using anti-homosexual

rhetoric (Johnson, 2019). Their advocacy was limited to issues that could be framed as protecting

children, such as abortion and sexuality, as those issues still fit within the limitations of what femininity means within the Christian Right (Johnson, 2019). Not only are these beliefs spread within the movement, but they are enacted and enforced, limiting what women can do and how they view themselves.

In terms of Christian education relating to gender, much of education within the United States is rooted in Christianity, or at least that is the perception that that is the case from the perspective of many American Christians. According to Dowland, one Christian school administrator writes, addressing the nature of early American education, that "at the beginning of our nation (1776) study materials used in schools were 100% Christian" (2015, p. 23). Even with the increase in curriculum content censorship in public schools, theoretically making them more acceptable for a Christian clientele, there has continued to be a strong presence of Christian schools and education within the United States. There are also specific historical cases of Christian values in schools being used to treat girls differently and promote different roles. Lomawaima (1994), in her book about the Chilocco Indian School, describes that the girls were taught only what they would need in order to be wives and mothers, with a focus on homemaking skills over academics. She writes that girls were trained to promote "a Christian, civilized lifestyle," reinforcing the presented gender roles with religion, and thus painting alternative versions of womanhood or family as negative (Lomawaima, 1994, p. 86). Although the school was publicly funded, Lomawaima worked with data from the 1920s and 1930s, when Christianity was much more integrated into public education, thus still showing how Christian beliefs have been used in education. This school shows a very restrictive and gender traditionalist view that aligns with the work of Whitehead and Perry (2019), even though it is an early

and different version of Christianity within the United States. The use of gender roles within Christian education can thus be understood as not limited to a modern Christian Right education system, but rather a historically rooted occurrence that is simply taking a new life in the form of book ban attempts and possibly Christian education systems as a whole.

2.3 Recent History of Christian Education the Right

Modern Christian education within the United States, especially that which is connected to the Christian Right, greatly rose in prevalence in the 1980s, with multiple organizations, including the ACSI, making it simpler for new Christian Schools to open (Dowland, 2015). This happened simultaneously with increased controversy over public education content, which also served to bolster Christian education systems (Dowland, 2015). These groups also provided a more standardized curriculum that was portrayed as a means of combating the secularization of public education and maintaining traditional values (Dowland, 2015). In comparison to what these Christian groups understood to be 100% Christian content in public schools at the founding of the United States, by the 1960s they perceived public education to be "almost devoid of Christian influence" (Dowland, 2015, p. 23). One 1980s Christian flier states, "UNTIL TEXTBOOKS ARE CHANGED, there is no possibility that crime, violence, VD and abortion rates will decrease…TEXTBOOKS mold NATIONS because they largely determine HOW a nation votes, WHAT it becomes and WHERE it goes!" (Dowland, 2015, p. 59). The key to not only the growth of Christian education in the 1980s, but also its success in textbook politics and books then and now – especially surrounding topics of sex education, sexuality, gender – is rooted in creating fear of what type of nation public curriculum will

create. Emphasizing the contrasts between secular curriculum and traditional Christian values and the way that they impact children has been, and remains, a common rhetorical tactic.

This fear tactic is also used regarding gender roles and representation, as the very idea that gender could be socially constructed was viewed as a threat to God's creation, thus, according to Dowland, the schools "would inculcate gender-specific behaviors in students in response to God's commands" (2015, p. 35). Even the critiques of curriculum from the Christian Right are not new, as one Christian school administrator stated, about public curriculum in the 1980's, that "Nowhere was it suggested that being a mother or homemaker was a worthy and important role for a woman," (Dowland, 2015, p. 37). In relation to feminist depictions in education such as women in the workforce, a Christian mother stated that they were a ""distortion" that was "deeply offensive to those women, whether conservative Christians or not, who choose to devote at least some years to the full-time care of their children"" (Dowland, 2015, p 61). Thus, the views shown in Whitehead and Perry (2019) regarding the connection between gender traditionalism and Christianity can be seen not as new and only connected to the most recent version of the Christian Right, but rather based in a long history of patriarchy and female subservience. In combination with the historical context of gendered education in Lomawaima (1994), the continued use of gendered education within Christian education and emphasis on maintaining traditional gender roles can be seen, paving the way for modern book bans attempts from the Christian Right. This also shows the way in which Apple's (1995) principles about the use of education as a means of bolstering the dominant power have been intentionally applied in order to reinforce specific religious ideology. Despite the Christian Right likely being

unaware of the academic backing that this tactic has, this is still a process that they are actively taking

advantage of in order to promote their beliefs.

Regarding the current connection between Christianity and book ban attempts in the United

states, Miller, Liu, and Ball (2023) state that Evangelical Christians are one of the key groups, although

definitely not the only group, that are contributing to the push to ban books connected to Critical

Race Theory, LGBTQ+ literature, and many other texts. However, in addition to challenging the texts

due to a belief that they are contradictory to their values, Miller, Liu, and Ball also suggest that there

are also more capitalistic motives behind it (2023). Essentially, if there is enough fear about the content

of public schools and their curricula, people will switch to private, Christian institutions instead,

allowing for them to have more students, and thus higher profits (Miller et al., 2023). Additionally,

Goncalves et al. (2024) show data that reveals that there may be some purely political motivation

behind book banning attempts as well, based on the party make-up of the areas where these ban

attempts are occurring. They found that rather than being from highly Republican or conservative

areas, they were instead most commonly found in places where there had been a decrease in

conservative voting. This also points away from a Christian values motivation towards the use of value

oriented book bans as a means of conservative mobilization and reactivation in the face of declining

numbers (Goncalves et al., 2024, p 4). Both Miller et al. (2023) and Goncalves et al. (2024) provide

new perspectives on Dowland's (2015) work, which primarily focuses on the religious motivations

toward starting more Christian schools as a means of maintaining Christian values, by positing that

there is more behind the movement than simply a fear of secularization. In this way, this could possibly

mean that the content in Christian schools may not be very different, if it truly is just a means to scare

people into giving them money or encourage conservative mobilization. However, as will be addressed later, there is no research comparing Evangelical and public curricula, making it difficult to confirm or deny their similarity.

Regardless of the true reason behind the curricular challenges and book ban attempts, the nature of curricular formation is such that in order to change it, a large amount of cultural backing is necessary, according to Binder's (2000) work on curricular challenges. In the framework for curricular challenges that Binder presents, which centers around cultural and organizational resources, the Christian Right has truly flourished by drawing on Evangelical Christianity as a block of cultural power (Binder, 2000). This was done by making the issues and topics that they wanted removed seem like a matter of life and death to Christian parents. Both Dowland (2015) and Miller, Liu and Ball (2023) portray this intense fear that is spread surrounding the impact on the future of the United States if the curriculum content in question remains. Essentially, the appeal to Evangelical Christian groups through fear has been used as a means of gaining power for the Christian Right, as education directly impacts their children.

All the historical connections and statistical evidence towards the beliefs of Evangelical Christianity and the Christian Right do not, however, address the actual content of their literature curriculum. Although there is previous research on the racial content of Christian curriculum, as seen in Scaramanga and Reiss (2018), as well as research on gender within other literature curricula (Amini & Birjandi, 2012; Cassese & Bos, 2013; Gomez-Najarro, 2020; Phan & Pham, 2021), there is a gap in research on the content of the Christian literature curriculum to see if it actually is in line with Christian nationalism and the beliefs that have been shown to exist within that community.

Additionally, there is no work comparing Christian literature curriculum to public school curriculum to address what differences exist in light of the impact that Christianity has had historically on American public education (Dowland, 2015). Lastly, although there is some discussion of how Christian education portrays its curriculum (Scaramanga & Reiss, 2018), it has not been compared to public education to see if there are different stated priorities, especially surrounding gender and the roles that people fill within the family and the workforce. To address this gap, I analyze the differences and similarities between the content of Christian and public school literature curricula and how they are presented, specifically through the lens of the ACSI and the CCSS. This provides new insight on the impact of Christian values on gender representation in literature curricula in an United States education context.

3. Methodology

3.1 Data Sources

The two groups' documents that I analyze are the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) and the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), reflecting an Evangelical Christian school perspective and a public school perspective, respectively. I chose the ACSI due to it being affiliated with Evangelical Protestantism, which is connected to groups that advocate for book bans and have gender traditionalist views (Whitehead & Perry, 2019; Miller et al., 2023). Additionally, it is the second-largest Christian education system in the United States (below the Roman Catholic system), with 2345 schools and over 486 thousand students according to the National Center for Education Statistics, and thus the largest system for which issues that I am addressing apply. The Common Core State Standards were selected as they are national recommendations put out for all

public schools in the United States. These selections should create a fairly representative sample of their respective types of curriculum, given the lack of influence of teachers creating their individualized curriculum for their classes, as well as the large number of students within both systems.

The texts that were selected for each education system in order to address what they portray as the goals for their curricula differ. Although they do not have the same documentation, the selected texts do reflect similar types of content about the different systems' beliefs and priorities. For the ACSI, their document titled "The Value of Expected Student Outcomes" and their "Statement of Faith" from their official website were selected (Wilcox; ACSI). This informs not only what they want their students to learn, but also provides a basic description of their religious beliefs. For the CCSS, selections of the State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects that addressed English Language Arts for grades nine and ten were chosen. As it is not a religious organization, there is no equivalent to the ACSI's statement of faith from the CCSS. These documents do not represent the actual content of the curricula, but do contextualize them within the broader goals of the education systems and allow for analysis of their public portrayal.

The curricular content for each system was based on what texts they recommended, either through text exemplars within the CCSS or through the literature curriculum that the ACSI recommends. The curriculum that the ACSI recommends is the *Implications of Literature* series, about which the ACSI states, "It complements a traditional, values-oriented curriculum, and it is free of material that conflicts with Christian school values" (ACSI "Literature Textbook Support"). The books for grades nine and ten were used, which recommend a total of 104 texts including poetry, short

stories, speeches, and novels. The CCSS text exemplars for grades nine and ten, which are found in an appendix to the State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects, include a total of 63 texts, including, but not limited to, poetry, drama, and informational texts. Both the exemplars and the curriculum separate the texts into different categories, providing smaller groups that can be compared to each other for more nuanced analysis. For more nuanced analysis of all the characters within a set of texts, the complete lists of character descriptions for each text from Sparknotes or Litcharts were used. This was done for a random sample of 10 short stories and novels from ACSI and 10 stories from CCSS, selected via a random number generator, as those are the largest, most general, and most similar categories for the two different curricula. This was done to isolate the key features and roles of all of the characters within the randomly selected texts in their most simplified and accessible portrayals. The descriptions from Sparknotes and Litcharts contain these key identifying features, making them the ideal source of data. The following is an example of these brief descriptions for the character Gregor Samsa from *The Metamorphosis* by Franz Kafka:

> A traveling salesman and the protagonist of the story. Gregor hates his job but keeps it because of the obligations he feels to pay off his father's debt and care for his family. He has transformed into a large bug and spends the rest of his life in that state. Although hideous and unrecognizable to others, Gregor retains his some of his [*sic*] inner life and struggles to reconcile his lingering humanity with his physical condition. ("The Metamorphosis Character List," n.d.)

3.2 Procedure

The research was broken down into two parts; coding and thematic analysis of the

organizational portrayals, and analysis of the gender representation within the text recommendations.

Regarding the coding methods for the values of the organizations, I used a combination of lumping

and splitting, depending on the type of text. I used lumping to provide succinct codes for larger

sections of cohesive text whereas I used splitting on the sections of text that required different codes

more frequently, or on a line-by-line basis (Saldaña, 2021). For the expected student outcomes, which

were bullet points, splitting was used as the information was very compact. For much of the CCSS

content, however, lumping was used as the data consisted of long, detailed paragraphs and therefore

getting the same information required a different method of coding. In terms of the type of

information that was coded, it loosely followed the methodology of descriptive coding as described by

Saldaña (2021, p. 134). The focus was on recording what was being discussed and noting repeated

terminology to see what topics were most prevalent within the documents from the different

education systems. Additionally, in vivo codes were used, once again to better see the repeated

terminology within the documents. Essentially, the focus of the coding was to ascertain what was

discussed most frequently to identify what the groups portray as most important. This translated to

less detail in the individual codes and more repetition of the same codes to provide the option for

quantitative analysis based on the proportion of specific code types, which in turn influenced the

themes. After the preliminary coding, there were nine different categories of codes that emerged:

family/gender, God and the Bible, college/career, curriculum formation, specific curriculum

recommendations, academic outcomes, personal/social outcomes, and spiritual outcomes (See

Appendix A for category details). These categories were broken down into three more general groups of categories: outcomes, ACSI specific, and curriculum and goals. They were then analyzed to form cohesive themes that corresponded with the information from both the CCSS and the ACSI, revealing the differences in how the two organizations portray themselves and what they prioritize.

In addressing the gender representation within the recommended texts, as well as how the texts are presented, there were multiple aspects of each text that needed to be identified. This included finding the gender of the author, gender of the main character (if applicable), and looking at the context in which the text was presented in the curriculum recommendation. The numbers for authorship and main characters were then broken down into categories to address the differences in representation for different categories of texts. These categories are Stories, Short Stories, and Novels; Poetry; Non-Fiction, Biography, and History; and Other (Science and Drama). For the character descriptions from the randomly selected subset of the texts, descriptive coding was again used (Saldaña, 2021, p. 134). This focused on recording the gender of the characters as well as the career, job, or role that they play within the story. If there was no specific role listed or described within the character description, the character's role was not recorded. This once again meant that there was not very much detail collected about the characters to enable greater breadth in the texts included, allowing for quantitative analysis of the representation of characters' genders in each curriculum. .

4. Findings

4.1 Goal Portrayals

The major themes that emerged from the texts are 1) the basis for educational practice and curriculum and 2) the role of education. The different systems have distinct understandings of

education and what should be emphasized to students. Regarding the basis for education, both curricula provide different reasons for their content, and emphasize different sources for material. CCSS uses research, teacher input, and global competency as the basis for educational practice and curriculum. The ACSI, however, provides different justifications, using Biblical standards and principles as the basis for educational practice and curriculum. The vast majority of codes related to curriculum formation for the ACSI focus on the Bible and spirituality, even including missions as something that should be included in the curriculum, which stand in stark contrast to CCSS repeatedly reinforcing that their curriculum must be based on evidence and proven methodology. The two systems also had different perspectives on who has the final say on what curriculum is presented in the schools. For CCSS, final decision making power lies with the teachers as they implement the standards that CCSS put in place, but for the ACSI, they reference their directors as having final say on interpretation of the Bible and what it means for their organization as its definite piece of literature.

The ACSI and CCSS also portray their ideas on the role of education very differently. CCSS's texts show a belief that the role of education is to academically prepare students for the workforce and higher education. There are repeated references to students needing to be college and career ready, and an overall emphasis on academic outcomes being the most important. Academic outcomes appear in CCSS's texts much more frequently than other outcomes, with very few references to personal or social outcomes in comparison. The ACSI, however, barely mentions workforce or college preparedness, with their emerging perspective on the role of education being that it should shape students into believers in Christianity and morally upright individuals. Although it did include some academic outcomes, the emphasis was on spiritual and personal/social outcomes, using phrases such as

"personal relationship with Christ," "spiritual health," and "spiritual maturity" as things they desire students to obtain through their system, reinforcing this idea (Wilcox). Numerically these differences in the two are seen with approximately 60% of the CCSS's codes being categorized as academic outcomes or college/career in comparison to almost 70% of the ACSI codes being categorized within God and the Bible, personal/social outcomes, or spiritual outcomes. The emphasis of these ideas leads to the conclusion that that is what they want people to see as their priority within their system and what they want students to learn from it.

Perhaps the most distinct difference in terms of what content was presented in the two organizations' documents is the presence or lack of references to not only God and the Bible, but also family structures and gender. Although there are a couple references to the Bible in CCSS, they are more as examples of types of texts to include within a curriculum rather than being framed as the basis for any curriculum or outcomes. CCSS also includes no references to family or gender, showing that this is either not something they consider, or at least is not something they want to outwardly portray. For the ACSI however, not only were these ideas present, but they were prevalent, showing the importance of these topics as something they want people to see as part of their belief system and what they teach and support within their schools.

Outside of the prevalence of these ideas, the ACSI also had an interesting organizational aspect of how they presented their views. Regarding marriage, gender, and sexuality within the ACSI's documents, despite them not being the focus, the ACSI did still place a strong emphasis on these beliefs, which is understood through where they placed them in the texts. These beliefs were found in their Statement of Faith (ACSI), in the same section as key doctrinal tenets of their theology. Items that

were listed along with those doctrinal tenets included that marriage is only between a man and a woman, sex is only to be had within marriage, and that there is a biological gender binary that is immutable. The placement of these beliefs in the context of doctrines about divine inspiration, the Holy Spirit, and the resurrection of Christ shows the importance that they place upon these ideas. Thus, although not connected to the overall themes and the comparison of the two groups, it does provide useful context for addressing the gender representation in the curriculum, given the strongly held beliefs on family structure and gender.

4.2 Recommended Texts

Although the CCSS presents their texts without contextual descriptions or categories outside of that of dramas, stories, etc., the ACSI breaks down their categories into different themes. This is the first aspect of the ACSI's curriculum that points toward more traditional views of gender and gender stereotyping as many of the themes that include texts by women are stereotypically feminine descriptors, especially in comparison to those that include male authored texts. Within the 9th grade curriculum poetry recommendations, there are four different themes: lyricism and joy, integrity, suffering, and power. Within lyricism and joy, four out of six are written by women, while one out of six within integrity are written by women. Power and suffering are made entirely up of texts written by men. These patterns continue in the 10th grade curriculum, appearing in the categories of short stories, biographies, and nonfiction. For the short stories, only women authors are included under the theme of compassion and one out of five authors for the theme of growth is female. The other categories, which are suspense, courage, irony, and greed, included exclusively male authors. For biographies, the theme of conscience is entirely female, in comparison to the male themes of adventure

and perseverance; for nonfiction the only female author is in the theme of sensitivity, with the themes

of satire and wit being entirely male in authorship. Essentially, although it did not apply to all the

categories, there does seem to a limitation of female authorship to themes such as sensitivity,

compassion, etc. without the inclusion of them under more stereotypically masculine themes such as

power and adventure, painting a limited picture of the types of content that women can and should

write and be recognized for.

As seen in Figure 1, the CCSS text exemplars have on average around 4% higher rates of female

authorship when compared to the recommended curriculum from ACSI. The only category where

CCSS does not exceed ACSI is the Other category, which only has two texts from ACSI – too few to

meaningfully compare to the 14 texts from CCSS. Besides this, the category in which the two

organizations are closest is Poetry, with 18.2% for CCSS and 17.1% for ACSI being written by women.

It is notable that four of the six female authored poems from ACSI are written by the same person,

Emily Dickinson, meaning that there are technically only three distinct female authors. When the

focus shifts from authorship to gender representation in the protagonists, main characters, or narrators

of the texts (in the Stories, Short Stories, and Novels category), there is a dramatic difference between

the curricula as well as well as shifts in the percentage of female representation in the two categories.

Within this category of texts, CCSS demonstrates 25% female authorship and 37.5% female main

characters, whereas the ACSI shows 15.2% female authorship and only 9.1% female main characters.

Essentially, although the two different education systems are not too different in terms of authorship,

the main characters of the recommended stories, short stories, and novels shows that CCSS places

more emphasis on the inclusion of female characters in comparison to the ACSI.
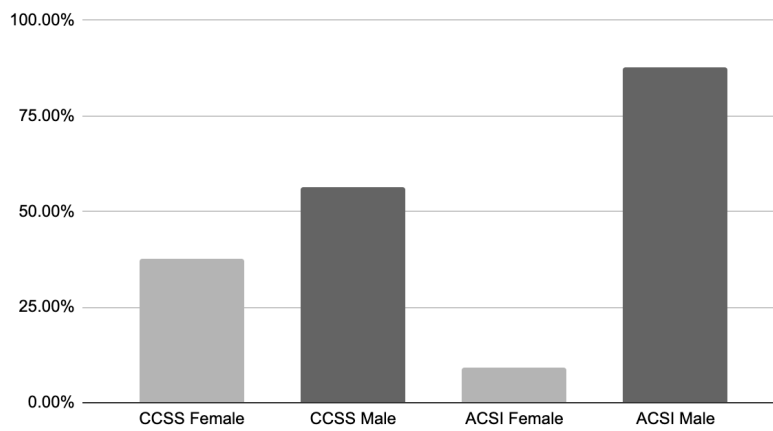
Figure 1

Author Gender by Category

	CCSS Female	CCSS Male	ACSI Female	ACSI Male
Stories, Short Stories, and Novels	25% (4)	75% (12)	15.2% (5)	84.8% (28)
Poetry	18.2% (2)	81.8% (9)	17.1% (6)	82.9% (29)
Non-Fiction, Biography, and History	23.8% (5)	71.2% (16)	18.2% (6)	81.8% (27)
Other (Science and Drama)	14.3% (2)	85.8% (12)	50% (1)	50% (1)
Total	21.0% (13)	79.0% (49)	17.4% (18)	82.5% (85)

Figure 2

Protagonist/Main Character Gender

Note: Only includes characters from the following categories of texts: Stories, Short Stories, and Novels

Figure 3

Protagonist/Main Character Gender

	CCSS	ACSI
Female	37.5% (6)	9.1% (3)
Male	56.3% (9)	87.9% (29)
Mixed/Multiple	6.3% (1)	3.0% (1)
Total	16	33

Note: Only includes characters from the following categories of texts: Stories, Short Stories, and Novels

Looking more broadly at gender representation for all the characters within the random sample of texts from the stories, short stories, and novels category, similar results are also found regarding the dramatic differences between CCSS exemplars and the ACSI recommended curriculum. Based on the Sparknotes and Litcharts character descriptions, both sets of texts show an overall larger percentage of representation of female characters than that of the main characters, but CCSS exemplars still remain significantly higher than the ACSI, with 42.3% of the total characters being female in the random subset that was analyzed compared to only 14.8% (Figure 4). Once again, although the texts recommended by CCSS are mostly authored by men, they still provide a substantial amount of female characters. The ACSI includes even fewer female characters relative to female authorship. Although there are significantly more characters in the CCSS exemplars in comparison to the ACSI, this can be explained by the presence of more short stories than novels in the ACSI sample, reducing the amount of side characters. There is a slight difference in the percentage of female representation when comparing the main characters and total characters, with approximately 5% female total characters. Although this could imply that female side characters are slightly favored in comparison to main characters, the change is not significant enough to be conclusive in terms of results.
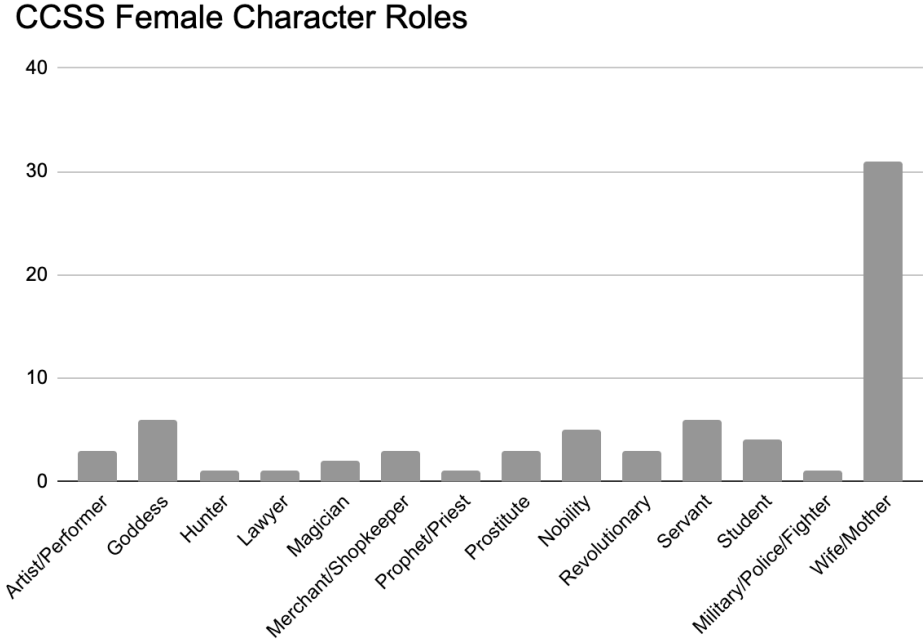
Figure 4
Random Sample Total Character Genders

	CCSS	ACSI
Female	42.3% (101)	14.8% (12)
Male	57.7% (138)	85.2% (69)
Total	239	81

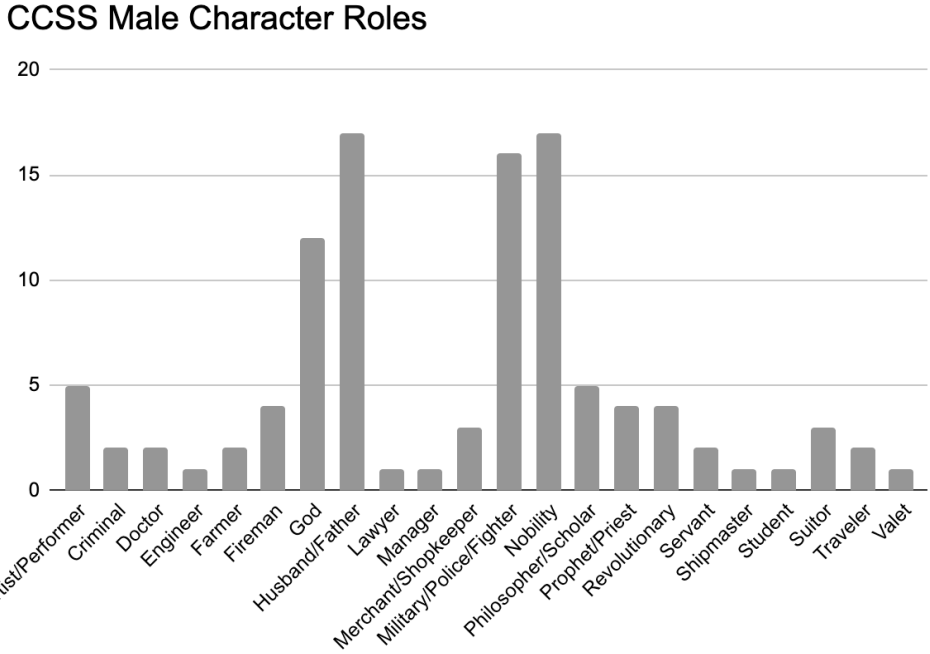*Note:* Only includes characters within the random sample of texts.

Regarding the specific roles or careers that the male and female characters play in both sets of recommended texts, both the ACSI and CCSS present women mostly in the role of mother or wife, with other roles being much less frequent. Nevertheless, within the ACSI texts, 50% of female characters are mothers/wives (Figure 5) in comparison to 44.3% for CCSS (Figure 7), showing that there is still slightly more diversity in presentation within CCSS exemplars – although this may be in part due to the larger number of characters overall. Interestingly, the ACSI does not reflect the same traditional familiar gender roles with portraying men in the main role of husband or father, as none of the male characters are identified as such, instead being portrayed as having other careers. CCSS, however, presents men as husbands or fathers – these roles are tied for the most frequent role for male characters along with nobility (including kings, barons, etc.). In terms of careers for women, the ACSI texts presented few options, with the only alternatives to being a wife being a revolutionary, servant, artist, or landowner, none of which are careers in the traditional sense. The CCSS exemplars, on the other hand, include women who are lawyers, shopkeepers, students, and fighters, providing more diverse representation, albeit still in small quantities in comparison to those who are mothers and wives. Essentially, despite both sets of texts emphasizing the roles of mother and wife, the CCSS exemplars provide more diverse representation for both men and women in terms of the roles that they play.

Figure 5

CCSS Female Character Roles

Note: Only includes female characters within the random sample of CCSS texts.
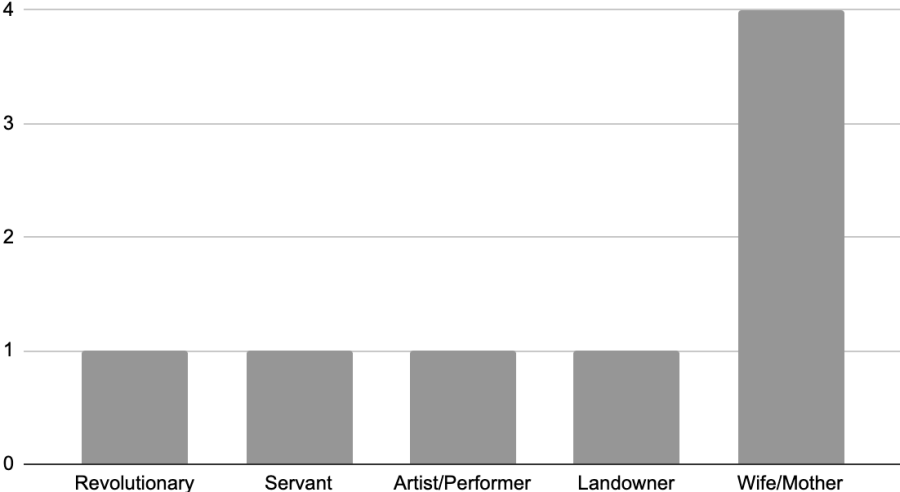
Figure 6

CCSS Male Character Roles

Note: Only includes male characters within the random sample of CCSS texts.
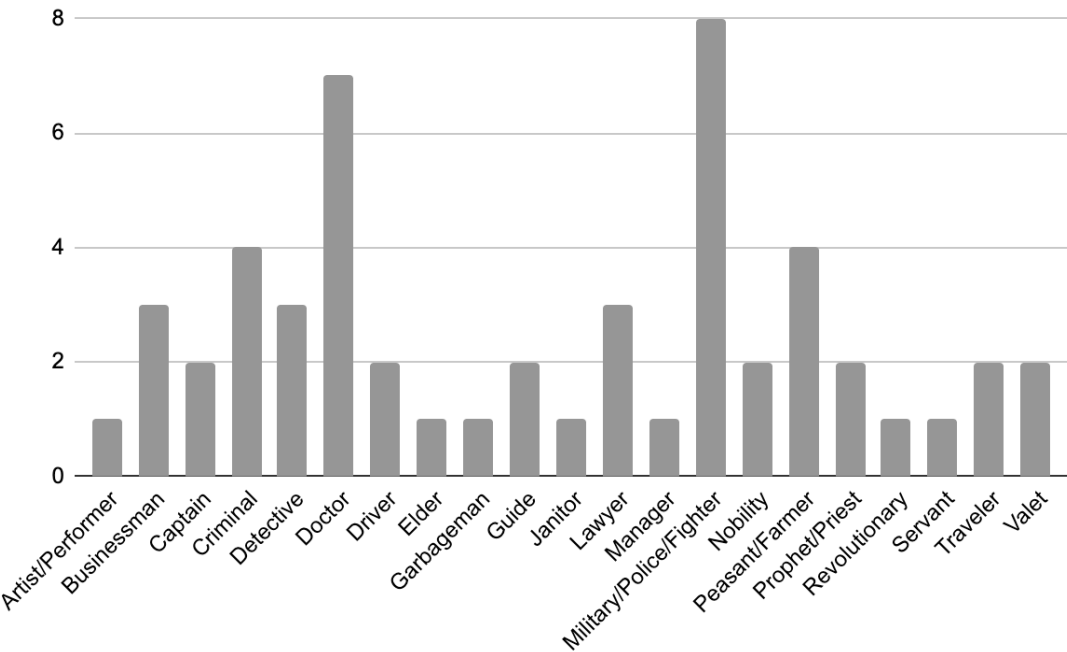
Figure 7

ACSI Female Character Roles

Note: Only includes female characters within the random sample of ACSI texts.

Figure 8

ACSI Male Character Roles

Note: Only includes male characters within the random sample of CCSS texts.

5. Discussion

The resulting themes for the ACSI and the CCSS show a clear difference in how they portray themselves and the goals that they say they have for their curriculum. These distinct themes – the ACSI focusing on the Bible and spirituality compared to the CCSS focusing on career and academic outcomes – suggest that there will be differences in the curriculum that they recommend, given the vastly different views on the role of education and what they base their curricula on. Along with the emphasis that the ACSI places on traditional marriage and heterosexuality, a clear picture of the connection between gender traditionalism and Christianity is seen in the placement of these topics. These priorities seem to be reflected within the different organizations' text recommendations in a variety of ways, including the stereotypical categories in which the female authors are included, the amount of female authorship, and the roles and amount of female characters in the texts.

Overall, the ACSI makes little attempt to include female characters in their texts, thus not allowing female students to take advantage of the benefits of representative literature in terms of engagement and thus achievement (Arday et al., 2021). The lack of female authorship and characters restricts girls' ability to see themselves as able to take on roles other than the narrow options presented in literature. This aligns with the lack of emphasis that the ACSI places on career and academic outcomes, as the lack of representation could contribute to a reduction in academic achievement on the part of female students. Additionally, it reinforces the traditionalist view on gender by not showing women, which is connected to the evangelical Christian values that the ASCI continuously reiterates as one of the most important aspects of their education system. The emphasis on family structure within the ACSI's documents and expected student outcomes is reflected in the curriculum, as it has very

limited roles for women outside of that of mother and wife. The lack of female representation shows that it is something the ACSI does not value, and instead underscores their commitment to instilling in students their moral worldview in which traditional gender roles are upheld.

For the CCSS exemplars, on the other hand, there are more diverse careers presented for female characters as well as higher female authorship and characters in general. Given the impact that representation in literature can have on engagement and thus achievement, this reflects the emphasis on career outcomes within the CCSS document as it is beneficial for the achievement of female students. The roles presented in the CCSS exemplars do seem to be representative of the views of Morrison (2015) and Corse and Griffin (1997) in that they are more classical roles, with a strong emphasis on nobility and military and fighting for male characters. The ACSI also aligns with this pattern, but takes the lack of female authors and characters even further due to their religious values. Nevertheless, despite the CCSS exemplars including more female representation in terms of authorship and diverse roles for female characters, the text recommendations still reflect an emphasis on presenting a set of texts that is viewed as important historically, thus restricting the representation that they include.

Regarding if they include any examples of content that people are seeking to ban, all of the roles of women within the ACSI curriculum recommendations do not seem to portray anything that would fit within the criteria for which people are arguing to ban texts. Instead there is still an emphasis on traditional, non-sexual, gender roles. The CCSS exemplars, however, do include three women who are prostitutes, which would easily fit into the fear of sexualization that exists within the Christian Right movement to ban books. Additionally, the ACSI's portrayed values of promoting Christian

morals and using the Bible as a basis for knowledge fits into the rhetoric of the Christian Right as they portray a fear of secular values and shifting cultural priorities in favor of tradition. These very values also illuminate the reasoning behind those who are challenging books, as it provides a clear understanding of what Evangelical Christians believe education should be about and what it should be influenced by. Despite the other factors that are at play, such as conservative political mobilization and monetary gain (Miller et al., 2023; Goncalves et al., 2024) on the part of Christian schools, the nature of the actual curriculum in combination with the values that the ACSI portrays points to the religious aspects of the book ban movement being legitimate rather than simply being a cover for those other goals.

6. Conclusion

Overall, the material that is presented by the ACSI does seem to be reflective of their gender views and emphasis on gender traditionalism, especially in terms of the representation of female characters within the literature recommended. The CCSS, although still limited in their inclusion of female authors, provides marginally more female authorship, and significantly more representation of female characters – even despite the historical impact of Christianity on the United States' public education system. Although CCSS exemplars still have less female representation than male representation, this is likely based more on the historical valorization of specific texts and their history than rooted in a desire to portray fewer women and encourage specific gender norms.

It can be understood that Christian education is actually more in line with the traditionalist beliefs that they try to promote via book banning and that there is a values-based backing for them in addition to the political motivation. These values, emphasizing Christian morals as well as gender

traditionalism, are also clearly represented in the ACSI's statement of faith as well as their expected student outcomes, meaning that they are something they actively support in addition to its more passive presence within the curricular recommendations. This, along with the emphasis on a gender binary and heterosexuality within the ACSI's goals, provides reason to believe that there are, in fact, gendered values underlying book banning attempts, regardless of the other factors that are at play such as conservative political mobilization and monetary gain on the part of the Christian organizations (Miller et al., 2023; Goncalves et al., 2024). Essentially, the gendered beliefs that are noted within Evangelical Christianity are present within the curriculum of the ACSI, as well as their expected student outcomes, meaning that they are in alignment with the beliefs that are argued for by those attempting to ban books in the public education system. Thus, although there are other motivations beyond the increase in book ban attempts and their justifications, the lack of representation that they support appears to be rooted in legitimately held moral beliefs, and actively exists within Evangelical Christian education in the United States.

In order to further address the impact that book ban attempts have had on Christian curricular content, or if they have simply always lacked representation, research would need to address changes that have happened in the curricula over time, as views on what literature should be included has changed. Additionally, looking at other grade levels would reveal whether or not this trend of less female representation persists across all grade levels within the ACSI or if it differs depending on the targeted age. Lastly, addressing the content of other education systems of different denominational affiliation, such as the Roman Catholic school system, may also provide an interesting lens into the nuance of how women are incorporated into literature curriculum from a different Christian

perspective. This piece also does not address queer or gender-nonconforming literature as a factor as it was not present within these curricula recommendations, but addressing its presence in individual school districts may yield interesting results. Overall, this research contributes to literature about the extent to which Christian values are incorporated into their education systems as well as the alignment of the systems with the rhetoric of other religious or political movements within the United States.

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Appendix A

Categories	Category Definition	Code Examples
Family/Gender	Codes that are related to the nature of, feelings towards, of acting out of gender, sexuality, and family structures	"Rights of parents", Biblical family, Gender Binary reflects God, Only male or female
God and the Bible	References to the Bible or God as a source, influence, aspect of the content, or Bible verses	"Biblical principles", Align with the Bible, Bible as authority, Jesus Christ is important
College/Career	Codes that include references to being prepared for college or a career or connections to workforce readiness	college readiness, "College and career readiness" "College and workforce training", competitive
Curriculum Formation	Reasoning behind the curriculum recommendations (excluding the Bible which is its own category) including ideas such as evidence or research-based, teacher-informed, diversity, etc. This also includes information on who gets a say in the formation of the curriculum.	"Internationally benchmarked", evidence based, Research based, "Constituent needs"
Specific Curriculum Recommendations	References to specific texts, types of texts, or topics that are/should be included in that education system	"World literature", Classics, Variety of types of texts, Exposure to missions
Academic Outcomes	Academic skills, abilities, that the documents state as wanting the students to obtain through the educational system	Broad knowledge, Problem solving, Reading skills, Research skills
Personal/Social Outcomes	Soft skills or personal growth related codes regarding what the educational organizations want the students to obtain	"Love for learning" Communication skills, Independent, responsible, curiosity, creativity
Spiritual Outcomes	Outcomes for how the student should relate to or what they should feel about spiritual or religious topics	Self-worth based on being God's creation, "Personal relationship with Christ", Defends Christian views