

There is no such thing as farmer's wife

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Abstract

A rant on gender bias against girls in kids' books.



British silent romantic comedy film directed by Alfred Hitchcock. IMDB

Since today is the International Women's Day, I want to vent about something that has been bothering me for quite some time. I keep coming across the phrase "farmer's wife" in children's books, songs, and elsewhere.

There is no such thing as "farmer's wife!" Although there are exceptions, typically farming is a family business, which means that if husband is a farmer, so is wife, or vice-versa. Think about it, have you heard the phrase "farmer's husband" ? Definitely not! A Google search for "farmer's husband" returns ~10K results, while "farmer's wife" returns 1.6 million.

As it is absurd to refer to a man, who himself is also a farmer, as "farmer's husband" because his wife is a farmer too. It is equally absurd to refer to a female farmer as "farmer's wife" because her husband is a farmer.

"Come on it is just a phrase!" you may say. However, it is not a single instance. There is a gender bias against women, particularly in kids' books/songs; lead characters are dominantly male, even if they are animals! Girls are typically sidelined in the stories. Florida State University made an extensive study that showed the huge gender bias in children's book[1]. They looked at 5,618 children's books published throughout the

twentieth century in the United States to find that “compared to females, males are represented nearly twice as often in titles and 1.6 times as often as central characters.” So this is a statistical fact.

Dear writers, composers, directors and all, if she is a farmer as well, she is not “farmer’s wife,” she is one of the farmers.

- A frustrated dad.

See my blog for more.

PS: Here are our favorite children’s books with lead girl characters:

- **The Most Magnificent Thing** by Ashley Spires,
- **We Don’t Eat Our Classmates** by Ryan T. Higgins.
- **Zackarina und der Sandwolf** by Asa Lind [possibly not available in English]

[1] J. McCabe, E. Fairchild, L. Grauerholz, B. A. Pescosolido, and D. Tope, “Gender in twentieth-century children’s books: Patterns of disparity in titles and central characters,” *Gender & Society*, vol. 25, no. 2, pp. 197–226, 2011, doi: 10.1177/0891243211398358. [Online]. Available: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243211398358>