

# Language frequently used in best-selling storybooks can thwart their intent to inspire girls

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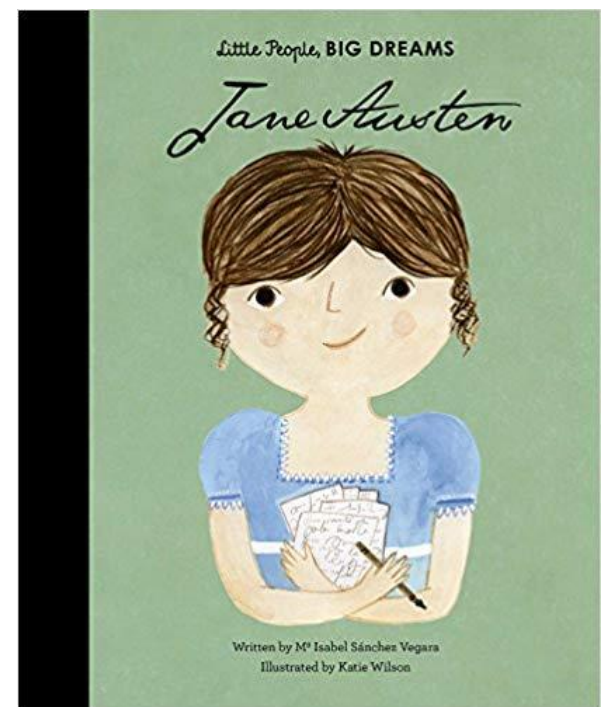
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An exploding market of storybooks seeks to motivate young girls to pursue careers where women have been historically underrepresented, but these storybooks contain **linguistic elements** that could undermine that intent.

By editing these elements out, we could better close the gender gap in career interest.

“Girls can be just as good at writing as boys!”

vs “Girls and boys can be equally good at writing!”



**directional comparisons**  
of girls to boys, even while expressing equality, can imply that boys set the standard and are better at the career (Chestnut, Zhang, & Markman, 2022)

“While other girls played with dolls, she played with a lizard...”

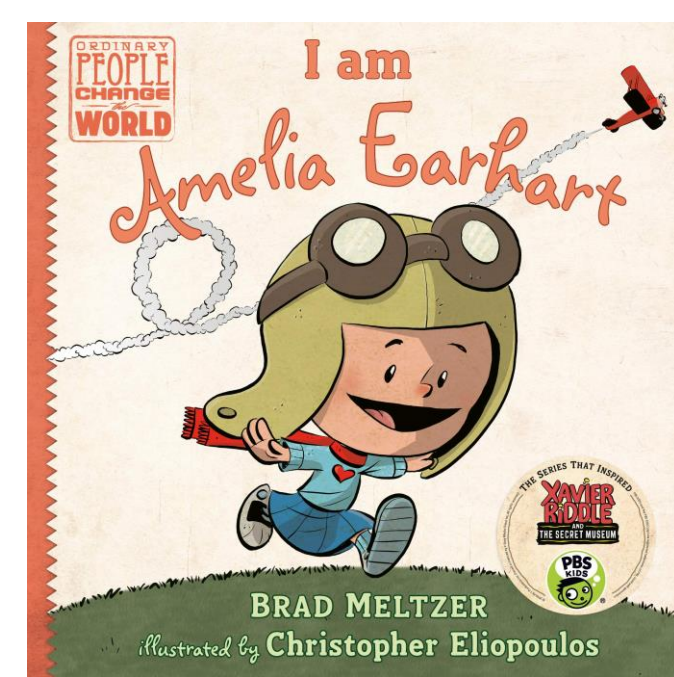
vs “She played with a lizard...”



**contrasts with girliness**  
may discourage young girls who like girly things from identifying with the career

“I was the first woman to fly across the Atlantic... I broke a record, flying faster than any man or woman ever.”

vs “I flew across the Atlantic... I crossed the ocean in a short time and flew very fast.”

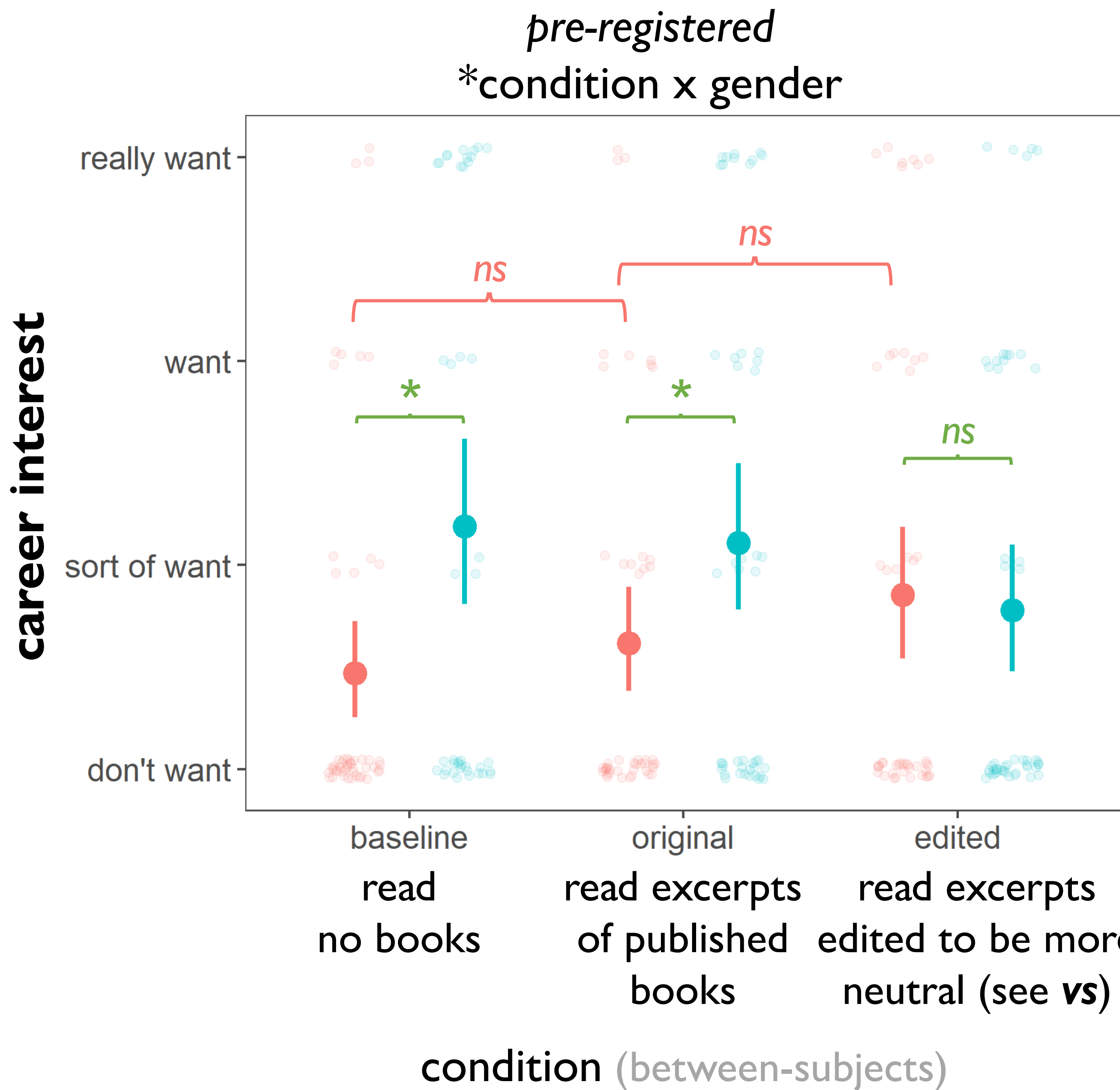


**exceptionalism**  
may suggest extraordinary abilities are necessary to succeed, which could be daunting to young girls (Bian, Leslie, & Cimpian, 2017)

US 5-6yo ♣ girls & ♣ boys  
n=96 (=16/condition/gender)  
n=41 at SF Bay Area school & museum, n=55 on Zoom

**career interest** asked after each book:  
**Do you want to be a** (writer/scientist/pilot) **when you grow up?**  
(yes/no → if yes: sort of want/want/really want)

**career gender stereotyping** also asked afterwards (data not presented here)



pre-registered  
Although neither the original or edited books increased girls' interest...

exploratory  
editing the problematic elements out closed a gender gap that persisted after reading the original books.

3 trials, each with a book featuring a fixed linguistic element & career trial order counterbalanced across participants