“Not One Looks like My Daughter!”: How American Girl Makes History Hegemony

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Abstract
American Girl markets dolls and books toward girls. Their original product line, which features historical characters, mobilizes history to teach moral lessons. This paper breaks down these morals to search for hegemony, a discourse that marginalizes minority readers. In this quest to uncover hegemony, the paper deals with issues of narrative perspective and socialization. Regarding narrative perspective, the paper asks, “Whom do these books deem normal in America? Whom do these books deem other in America?” Regarding socialization issues, this paper asks, “What value and behaviors do these books condone as part of acceptable American Girlhood? What values and behaviors are deemed totally aberrant and unacceptable?” In establishing normative perspectives and trajectories, the books raise issues about race, socioeconomic class, gender roles, religious identities, and nationalism. Given this particular line of questioning, this paper falls under the contemporary historical pursuit to problematize the very idea of historical accuracy, to uncover excluded voices from the traditional canon. The paper concludes that American Girl use history to perpetuate hegemony over young women in the United States.

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