

# How metadata can help children's publishers avoid harmful gender stereotyping



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We know that our role as publishers is more than a commercial one: books are cultural objects. What we publish, and how we promote it, can change attitudes and opinions. And as children's publishers, we have a moral responsibility to 'do no harm' to children.

The Fawcett Society, as part of its campaign to [Smash Stereotypes](#), has published the report '[Unlimited potential: report of the Commissions on Gender Stereotypes in Early Childhood](#)' which outlines the harm that traditional gender stereotypes can do to all children, and how they can go on to influence outcomes into adulthood.

The commission, which included staff from Usborne and Pearson as representatives from the publishing industry, covered three sectors: education practitioners, the commercial sector, and parenting.

Subject category codes are one of the keys to improving discoverability across the book trade (including school and library supply), and correct use of codes from various schemes can help to highlight books that expressly avoid stereotyping. The following notes are written to help anyone who applies subject codes to children's books, or who needs/is interested to understand how those codes work to make books discoverable.

## Contents:

1. Know your subject categories (*Thema*)
2. Know your qualifiers (*Thema*)
3. Know your keywords
4. Know your BIC and BISAC codes

## 1. Know your subject categories (*Thema*)

In *Thema*, codes beginning with a letter (A–Y) are called subject category codes. All 'Children's, Teenage and Educational' codes start with the letter Y.

### 'General interest' categories

The first two Y codes which relate specifically to gender are both under the code YNM:

- **YNMF – children's & teenage general interest: girls and women**
- **YNMH – children's & teenage general interest: boys and men**

*Thema* provides guidance notes on how to use these codes, essentially that they should be used:

- Where girlhood/womanhood, or boyhood/manhood is a central theme
- Note that these are *subject* codes so relate to what the book is *about*, not who it's *for*

Note also that a book about girlhood or boyhood as it pertains to a teacher or social worker would NOT use a YNM code.

For those using Virtuales' Biblio, the first code in the list is your primary code – in ONIX parlance, the 'MainSubject'. Other systems have equivalent methods of indicating the main subject. Unless the book is *only* about boyhood/girlhood, we would recommend that you use a YNM code – if appropriate for your book – as a secondary code (*ie. not* the first in the list).

Notation	Category heading	?
Y	Children's, Teenage and Educational...	*
YN	Children's / Teenage: General interest...	*
YNM	Children's / Teenage general interest: Places and peoples...	*
YNMC	Children's / Teenage general interest: Countries, cultures and national identity	*
YNMD	Children's / Teenage general interest: Celebrations, holidays, festivals and special events	*
YNMF	Children's / Teenage general interest: Girls and women Use for: books where girlhood / womanhood is a central theme	*
YNMH	Children's / Teenage general interest: Boys and men Use for: books where boyhood / manhood is a central theme	*
YNMK	Children's / Teenage general interest: City and town life	*
YNML	Children's / Teenage general interest: Rural and farm life	*
YNMW	Children's / Teenage general interest: Queens, kings, princesses, princes etc	*

Click on the image above to [see the YNM codes on the EDItEUR website](#)

## 'Personal and social topic' categories

The third Y code which relates specifically to gender is YXC:

- **Children's / Teenage personal and social topics: Gender identity**

*Thema* provides guidance notes on how to use this code, essentially that it is for books about:

- 'What it means to be a girl or boy or questions about identity'.

Notation	Category heading	?
Y	Children's, Teenage and Educational...	*
YX	Children's / Teenage: Personal and social topics...	*
YXC	Children's / Teenage personal and social topics: Gender identity Use for: titles that deal with anything to do with gender for young people, for example what it means to be a girl or boy or questions about identity. Use with: other codes as appropriate to give more information. See also: YNMF Children's / Teenage general interest: Girls and women, YNMH Children's / Teenage general interest: Boys and men	*

Click on the image above to [see the YXC code on the EDItEUR website](#)

## Good to know...

EDItEUR currently has an international working group looking at updates to *Thema*, and following up on the Fawcett Society recommendations it will be discussing if a subject code or qualifier could be added to *Thema* to make it easier to categorise titles which 'actively challenge traditional gender stereotypes'.

## 2. Know your qualifiers (*Thema*)

In *Thema*, codes beginning with a number (1–6) are called qualifier codes. These must always be used *in conjunction with* subject categories. In relation to gender, we're looking at the codes beginning with 5, which are 'interest qualifiers'.

### 'Intended for specific groups' codes

The first *Thema* code which relates specifically to gender is the code 5J which denotes books 'intended for specific groups', and it's broken down as:

- **5JA – intended primarily or specifically for women and/or girls**
- **5JB – intended primarily or specifically for men and/or boys**

*Thema* provides guidance notes on how to use these codes, essentially that they should be used:

- In exceptional circumstances only (*ie.* we'd expect very few books to fall into this category)
- For books written *specifically and purposefully* for women/girls or men/boys

Other than those limited few exceptions, publishers should question whether they should categorise books by an intentionally-gendered audience.

Do familiarise yourself with the intended use for these codes, so that they are applied accurately and consistently, enabling customers to discover only relevant/appropriate books in this category.

Notation	Category heading	?
5	Interest qualifiers...	*
5J	Intended for specific groups...	*
5JA	Intended primarily or specifically for women and/or girls Use for: 5JA in exceptional circumstances for material that is intended to be read by women and/or girls, in that the material was written specifically and purposefully for this audience. The material does not necessarily have to be specifically about women or girls	*
5JB	Intended primarily or specifically for men and/or boys Use for: 5JB in exceptional circumstances for material that is intended to be read by men and/or boys, in that the material was written specifically and purposefully for this audience. The material does not necessarily have to be specifically about men or boys	*

Click on the image above to [see the 5J codes on the EDItEUR website.](#)

## 'Relating to specific groups and cultures or social and cultural interests' codes

The second *Thema* code which relates specifically to gender is the code 5P which denotes books 'intended for specific groups', and is described as:

- **5P – relating to Trans / Transgender people or gender minorities**

*Thema* provides guidance notes on how to use this code, essentially that it's for books:

- Relating to transsexual, transgender, gender non-conforming, non-binary, genderqueer, gender minority, two spirit, or third gender people.
- Of interest to, OR has themes relating to, OR is about, those whose gender is different (wholly or partially) from that assigned to them at birth, or gender variance in cultures who have established more than two genders.

Note that this is slightly unusual as a qualifier as it relates to subject matter but there is an obvious overlap with intended audience.

Notation	Category heading	?
5	Interest qualifiers...	*
5P	Relating to specific groups and cultures or social and cultural interests...	*
5PT	Relating to Trans / Transgender people or gender minorities Class here: transsexual, transgender, gender non-conforming, non-binary, genderqueer, gender minority, two spirit, third gender etc. Use for: material that is of interest to, or has themes relating to, or is about, those whose gender is different (wholly or partially) from that assigned to them at birth, or gender variance in cultures who have established more than two genders. Use with: other subjects as appropriate, such as JBSF3, YXB, F* codes etc	*

Click on the image above to [see the 5P codes on the EDItEUR website](#)

### 3. Know your keywords

Here is some keyword guidance that applies in general, not just in relation to gender:

- First, people will tell you that 'more is better'. It is – up to a point. But there is no value in including hundreds of keywords, or even one hundred. **Only the first 30 or so make any difference** (Amazon, for example, ignores anything beyond about 210 characters, and it appears that other retailers have similar limits).
- Secondly, do **put your keywords in a specific order** as, no matter how many you have, the ones at the end are more likely to be ignored than the ones at the beginning of your list.
- [This article from the Book Industry Study Group](#) is recommended if you're interested in reading more.

In relation to gender, please consider your editorial stance and/or ask about your company policy on this. Any publishers who are keen to make a change in this area, and work together to stop perpetuating harmful gender stereotypes, will want to make sure that keywords do not include phrases such as 'for girls' or 'for boys', in the same way that they would wish to eliminate these from book titles and from the book's descriptive text (short and long descriptions).

## 4. Know your BIC and BISAC codes

It's worth noting that *Thema* is Amazon's preferred subject scheme (outside North America) so all UK publishers should be using *Thema*. BIC (the subject scheme) hasn't been updated since 2010, and it won't be updated in the future (although it is still used by c.50% of UK booksellers, its use is diminishing). BIC (the organization) recommends that all publishers switch to *Thema*, and *Thema* is mandatory at all levels in BIC's Product Data Excellence accreditation scheme.

### BIC codes (UK)

The BIC subject scheme doesn't include any of the codes above, or any other codes relating to gender.

[See all the BIC categories on the EDItEUR website.](#)

### BISAC codes (USA and anglophone Canada)

BISAC Codes include the following codes relating to gender.

- JUV005000 JUVENILE FICTION / Boys & Men
- JUV014000 JUVENILE FICTION / Girls & Women
- JNF009000 JUVENILE NONFICTION / Boys & Men
- JNF023000 JUVENILE NONFICTION / Girls & Women
- YAF007000 YOUNG ADULT FICTION / Boys & Men
- YAF022000 YOUNG ADULT FICTION / Girls & Women
- YAN009000 YOUNG ADULT NONFICTION / Boys & Men
- YAN023000 YOUNG ADULT NONFICTION / Girls & Women

There are no guidance notes in relation to any of the codes above, so their intended use is unclear. Relevant industry bodies believe that these codes could/possibly are being used to indicate the target market by gender. That is something that we as children's publishers should be giving serious consideration to, since it may contradict our aims or stated company policies.

[See all the BISAC categories on the Book Industry Study Group website.](#)

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