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Gender Stereotyped Descriptors in Children's Picture Books: Does "Curious Jane" Exist in the Literature?

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GENDER STEREOTYPED DESCRIPTORS IN CHILDREN'S PICTURE BOOKS:
DOES "CURIOUS JANE" EXIST IN THE LITERATURE?

BY
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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
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IN
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to examine the subtle effects of gender stereotyping in children's literature through the use of differential language, and to test hypotheses derived from a feminist framework. One general hypothesis tested was that female and male characters would not be represented equally in the literature. It was expected that female characters would be underrepresented in titles, pictures, and central roles. A second hypothesis was that there is a relationship between gender stereotypes and adjectives used to describe female and male characters in children's picture books. It was predicted that (a) adjectives used in children's books would be different for female and male characters, (b) male characters would more often be described with words connoting strength, activity, positive evaluation, and masculinity, while female characters would more often be described with words connoting weakness, passivity, negative evaluation, and femininity, and (c) female and male authors would not differ in their use of stereotyped descriptors. Part I included a working sample of Caldecott Medal and honors books for the period, 1984-1994 (N=30). Gender of each author and information about each character [gender, developmental status (child, teenager, adult), animal versus human status, ethnicity (minority versus European/American)] was recorded by the researcher. Eighteen raters were used to record adjectives for each character from all of the children's books in the sample. There were three recording sessions with three pairs of raters in each. Part II included a sample of 50 travelers from a metropolitan train station, bus terminal, and airport. From Part I, the researcher

identified the 20 most commonly recorded adjectives for female characters and the 20 most commonly recorded adjectives for male characters. These adjectives were then presented with Semantic Differential scales to the participants. The prevalence of female characters in titles, central roles, and pictures was assessed by counting and recording the raw numbers of female and male characters in each category. Three chi squares were used (one for each category) to determine if females are underrepresented in comparison to males. Results show that males are presented more often than females in titles and pictures. No difference was found between the number of female and male characters in central roles. From Part II, each participant's ratings produced a score for each adjective on the factors of potency, activity, evaluation, and gender association. Independent t-tests were conducted for each of the four factors to determine if a difference exists in the types and meanings of adjectives used to describe female and male characters. Analysis revealed significant difference between groups on all four factors. Boys/men were described with adjectives that are more potent (powerful), active, and masculine than girls/women. However, contrary to prediction, the adjectives used for girls/women were more positively evaluated than those used for boys/men. Next, use of the 40 most commonly used adjectives for female and male characters in each of the children's books was determined. Comparison was made between female and male authors' use of adjectives. T-tests were conducted to determine if a significant difference exists in the way that female and male authors use the descriptors. Results confirmed the prediction that female and male authors do not differ in their use of descriptors.

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STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Stereotypes are learned, widely shared, socially validated general beliefs about categories of individuals. These beliefs are widespread and are thought to hold a kernel of truth (Eagly & Wood, 1991), but are typically inaccurate. Stereotypes oversimplify and exaggerate attributions made to groups creating distinctions between categories which are greater than actual observed differences. Stereotypes are powerful and enduring and are often maintained through self-fulfilling prophecies. They are pervasive in family life, educational institutions, and industry.

Gender categories are socially defined through stereotypes, in terms of expected behavior, attributes, and values (Lott & Maluso, 1993). One approach to gender is to view it as a social construction; for example, that gender categories are developed and maintained through the use of language. According to Beall (1993), gender is both culturally and individually constructed. "Cultures distinguish between two or more genders and organize beliefs and activities according to these categories. Individuals are influenced by the existence of these categories and their perceptions of the world are organized according to them" (Beall, 1993, p.144).

Children's knowledge of gender begins at an early age. By the age of three, children are able to distinguish between themselves and the other sex (Jacklin & Maccoby, 1978; Wasserman & Stern, 1978). By age five, many children have already formed rigid stereotypes (Schlossberg & Goodman, 1972). As children develop, they learn their own gender assignment and come to understand the ways certain behaviors and activities are associated with gender categories. Children learn to assign certain personality characteristics to girls and

boys. "The acquisition of gender stereotypes is a continuing process, representing a gradual increase in the amount and complexity of information as the child grows older" (Deaux & Kite, 1993, p.124). Development of gender role identity is shaped by shared beliefs of society, by oversimplified gender role stereotypes. These affect a child's self-concept, interaction with peers and adults, expectations that others have for their behavior, and expectations for reciprocating behavior (Kortenhaus & Demarest, 1993).

There are both social and political implications of gender construction. Gender serves as a "mechanism of social control" (Unger, 1990, p.122). Gender categorizing has created a social hierarchy of power based upon the male agenda (Morawski, 1987). This agenda is one in which White heterosexual males are viewed as the standard to which all other humans are compared. White males are at the top of the hierarchy. They are awarded privilege at this high status position and, from this, gain access to power and control in society. Women generally have lower status, and less privilege, power, and control. They typically can access these through association with White males. Women and men who differ from the norm (i.e., individuals of minority ethnicities and those who are not heterosexual) typically fall into lower status positions on the hierarchy.

Media sources play a part in early gender role development (Brooks-Gunn & Matthews, 1979). Language is often utilized as a media tool to maintain the gender status of individuals in our society. Language is so powerful and presents a paradox; on one hand, it offers freedom for individuals to express themselves and to create; and, on the other hand, it restricts our ability to create. Language serves as a vehicle to perpetuate or abandon stereotypes. It plays a strong role in the "determination of a society's future, by providing the basic models from

which children form their ideas about themselves and others" (Rachlin & Vogt, 1974, p.549).

Descriptors used in language serve to maintain social and political inequalities between women and men. Independent, aggressive, bold, and adventurous are labels used to describe the "typical" man; while quiet, caring, expressive, emotional are labels used to describe the "typical" woman. Stereotypical expectations created for women and men through the continued use of gender labels perpetuate the distinction between "feminine" and "masculine" attributes. In this way gender stereotypes maintain the association between certain labels that describe ways of behaving and persons of a certain sex (Lott, 1981). Morawski (1987) suggests that gender stereotypes take root in the "manufacturing of difference" (p.49) between sexes, which includes devaluation of what are considered "feminine" characteristics.

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

"Texts are important influences that shape us by reflecting the politics and values of our society" (Fox, 1993, p.656). They are highly interactive; they mold and construct us by presenting images of ourselves. They define what it means to be female or male in our society. Books provide role models; from this, children learn what behavior is acceptable for them, for their peers, and for adults around them. They learn what to say and do, they learn what's expected of them, and they learn right from wrong.

Texts serve as a vehicle for the acquisition of gender stereotypes. For many years authors of children's literature have portrayed females with narrow characteristics. They are often secondary characters; are regularly found in domestic settings; and are often in need of rescue by male characters. Male

characters are also presented in stereotyped roles, but these roles are positive and sought-after. For example, boys and men more often serve in central roles (as protagonists); are portrayed as leaders, decision-makers, and heroes; and are often involved in occupations and roles outside of the home. As McArthur and Eisen (1976) pointed out, female readers of children's literature must identify with the male characters in these stories if they are to gain any sense of achievement from literary role models.

In the early 1970s, research on gender bias in children's literature emerged as a result of the women's movement. Reviewing literature from the 1960s, Key (1971) found that male characters were more often involved in dominant, active roles (adventurous, bread-winning), while females existed in passive, victimized roles. A difference was also identified through physical presence (power position) of character. Males were described as taller, older, in front of, or leaning over female characters. Key (1971) concluded that in the portrayal of boys and girls in children's literature, "boys do; girls are".

Weitzman, Eifler, Hokada, & Ross (1972) conducted one of the "hallmark" studies in the area of gender bias and children's literature. They evaluated Caldecott Medal-winning and honors picture books, Newbery Award winners and runners-up, Little Golden Books, and others described as "etiquette books" written in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. Their main focus was to determine if gender distinctions existed in the prevalence of characters and the representation of characters in roles. They found that females were greatly underrepresented in titles, central roles, and illustrations, by an 1:11 ratio. In fact, in approximately one-third of the Caldecott books analyzed, there were no females at all. Another major finding was that female characters were generally "inconspicuous and nameless" (p.1128). They were portrayed in roles which are not valued in the eyes of American society. Girls and women were shown as helpers, caretakers,

followers, and servers of others, while boys and men were portrayed as exciting and engaged in "heroic activity" (p.1131). More specific descriptions of roles held by females include the following: passive, immobile, restricted by clothing, prize for male adventurousness, dependent, pleasers, "saved", static, "pretty dolls -- to be admired and to bring pleasure". Typical roles for male characters included leader, independent, achiever, self-confident, outdoors "in the real world", in constant motion, interacting with the world around him, the "rescuer". For females, occupations included domestic worker, garden tender, baker, nurse, child-tender, and launderer. Most often, females took on the roles of mother, wife, fairy godmother, fairy, witch, or underwater maiden. On the other hand, males occupied positions of storekeeper, housebuilder, king, prince, fighter, fisherman, policeman, soldier, cook, and bearer of knowledge. Notice the distinctions that can be made between the roles of females and males in terms of power, strength, activity, and *richness* of character. Furthermore, roles prescribed for female characters in the children's books are those that are not valued in our society. This creates an even greater distinction in meaning and worth for the differing gender roles.

Rachlin and Vogt (1974) examined pictures from 30 coloring books for children which were prominently displayed in retail market stores in order to determine if differences existed in portrayal of female and male characters. Some of the coloring books had been in publication for as long as ten years; others had been published more recently. They found an equal number of females and males portrayed in the coloring books, differing from the findings of Weitzman et al. (1972) for reading books, but also found qualitative distinctions between "boy activities" and "girl activities". Male characters were pictured primarily in outdoor and competitive activities, while female characters were shown in more passive activities inside of the home. The most notable difference

was in the portrayal of children imitating, in their play activities, the career roles of women and men. The career roles occupied by women tended to require little skill and preparation, while the career roles for men "necessitated some special skill, training, or higher education" (p.533).

During the 1970s, sex stereotyping in children's literature was made salient. Publishers agreed to make changes in the texts, scripts, and pictures of children's books in order to ensure equal treatment of females and males. "By 1978 almost all of the major textbook publishers had issued guidelines to discourage sexist portrayals of women in children's books" (Lott, 1994, p.48). Since then, there have been a number of studies of gender stereotyping in children's books.

Character Prevalence

Even after the publishers' guidelines, male characters still appear more frequently in titles, central roles and illustrations than female characters (Graebner, 1972; Heintz, 1987; Kortenhaus & Demarest, 1993; McDonald, 1989; Weitzman et al., 1972). Although the numbers remain unequal, some researchers have found that in the last few decades, there has been a trend towards greater equality in the literature. Specifically, there has been a gradual increase in the numbers of female characters in titles, central roles, and illustrations (Collins, Ingoldsby, & Dellmann, 1984; Kortenhaus & Demarest, 1993). Kortenhaus and Demarest (1993) are careful, however, to point out that although there has been an increase in female representation, the way in which female characters are portrayed is still sexist and biased.

Characters' Roles and Activities

Further study of children's literature has found that female and male characters are often depicted in gender-stereotyped activities. Of 100

children's picture books published between 1972 and 1974, only 68 portrayed women in an actual role/activity. In addition, 68% of those in roles were identified as homemakers or domestics (Stewig & Knipfel, 1975). Consistent with past research (Rachlin & Vogt, 1974; Weitzman et al., 1972), recent findings indicate that female characters are portrayed more often than male characters in passive, domestic, limited and devalued roles, while males thrive in active, dominating, valued roles (Charnes, Hoffman, Hoffman, & Meyers, 1980; Kortenhaus & Demarest, 1993; McDonald, 1989; Marten & Matlin, 1976). In a sample of 14 Caldecott Medal winning children's books, Heintz (1987) evaluated the occupations and activities of female and male characters and found gender bias. In particular, her results indicate that males were presented in three times as many different occupations as females.

Emotion

Few studies focus specifically on use of emotion as a way to perpetuate gender stereotyping in children's books. One in particular by Moore and Mae (1987) addresses this indirectly by investigating portrayals of female and male responses to death and dying in children's literature. A sample of 52 books (published from 1970-1983) intended for readers 10 to 14 years of age was used to analyze characters' responses to death and dying. Results indicated that females were presented as more tearful and dependent than male characters. Male characters were seen as less able to deal with their feelings, if at all (they "toughed it out"), while females worked out feelings of grief through communication with others. The findings support the stereotypical notions of women as expressive and dependent, and men as instrumental and agentic. Moore and Mae found that although the presence of female and male characters approached equality, there was a high representation of females in central roles. Given that the sample of books selected deal essentially with issues of death and

dying, the authors suggest that choice of a female as the central character may facilitate the theme of the stories. They suggest that there may exist an assumption that "emotionally-laden topics like death are more appropriately handled through female characters" (p.61).

Other Variables

More recent research has expanded the focus of gender stereotyping in children's books to variables other than those identified in past studies. For example, Tetenbaum and Pearson (1989) examined moral orientations in relation to gender stereotyping in 50 children's books. They found that female characters were portrayed as largely oriented toward caring as a moral goal, while male characters were oriented more toward justice as a final goal. This is consistent with Gilligan's (1982) position that girls are socialized to be nurturant, empathetic, and caring, while boys are taught to be independent, assertive, and achievement-oriented, and that females resolve moral dilemmas through a "caring" model, while males resolve moral dilemmas by considering rights and rules.

Another example is the work of Crabb and Bielawski (1994). They investigated gendered portrayals of material culture in Caldecott Award winning children's books published between 1937 and 1989. They operationally define material culture as "technology as well as human-made objects and settings used in sustenance, work, travel, and play" (p.69), and they hypothesized a relationship between this and gender in children's books. The results of their study showed a greater number of female characters using household artifacts, while a greater number of male characters were portrayed using nondomestic artifacts. Furthermore, they found no change over time (from 1937 to 1989) in the gendered portrayals of female and male characters' use of these artifacts.

In the investigations of gender stereotyping in children's literature discussed above, most emphasis has been placed on overt variables such as

roles, activities, occupations, emotion, etc. To date, there has been no study of the more subtle effects of gender stereotyping in children's literature, through the use of differential language. It is important to identify and analyze the actual words chosen by authors of children's books. The present study focused on such words used to describe girls and boys, women and men, and their activities.

HYPOTHESES

One general hypothesis tested in this study was that female and male characters are not represented equally in children's literature. It was expected that female characters would be underrepresented in titles, pictures, and central roles.

A second hypothesis was that there is a relationship between gender stereotypes and descriptors used for female and male characters in children's picture books. In this study, descriptors were operationalized as adjectives. It was predicted that (a) adjectives used in children's books would be different for female and male characters, (b) male characters would more often be described with words connoting strength, activity, positive evaluation, and masculinity, while female characters would more often be described with words connoting weakness, passivity, negative evaluation, and femininity, and (c) female and male authors would not differ in their use of stereotyped descriptors.

METHOD

Part I

Sample. The books examined for the study are Caldecott Medal and "honors" books (Association for Library Service to Children, 1994) for the period

1984-1994. The Caldecott Medals are given by the American Library Association to honor the year's most distinguished children's books. The Caldecott award has been presented annually since 1938 for the best in picture books for preschoolers (Smith, 1957). Runners-up have also been recognized in each category, and are now called "honors" books. The popularity of these books, both in libraries and in bookstores, suggests that they are accurate representations of children's actual reading material. Previous investigators have examined these books for gender stereotyping (Collins et al., 1984; Crabb & Bielawski, 1994; Weitzman et al., 1972). From 1984 to 1994 there were 41 total Caldecott Medal and "honors" books. The present study excluded medal winners and "honors" books lacking written text and/or adjectives (see Appendix A), leaving a total of 30 as the sample of books studied.

Procedure. Gender of each author and information about each character [gender, developmental status (child, teenager, adult), animal versus human status, ethnicity (minority versus European/American)] was recorded by the researcher. The number of female and male characters in titles, central roles, and pictures was recorded by the researcher and her assistant. Central roles were those of the main characters, those the books were mostly about. In most instances, those who fell into central roles was very clear. In instances where it was difficult to determine those who fit into central roles, the researcher and her assistant counted the number of pages on which the character was pictured. The character with the highest number of representations was identified as in a central role. In some instances, there was more than one main character per book. All books were covered with brown paper to control for possible confounding effects of each book's award-winning status and year of publication (Kortenhaus & Demarest, 1993).

Eighteen raters recorded adjectives used in all of the books in the sample. Raters were undergraduates from the University of Rhode Island enrolled in an introductory psychology course. They participated in fulfillment of a course requirement. The raters were given a set of standardized instructions, including information about how to identify an adjective, and were given practice (using text from a book outside of this sample) to ensure proper recording of adjectives (see Appendix B). The raters were blind to the hypotheses. Three rating sessions were held, with six raters per session. At each session, raters were randomly paired and each group of two evaluated 10 books. They were asked to record, on standard forms provided, all of the adjectives used to describe the characters in the books. The character's name and title of the book were listed at the top of each form, and space was provided for recording and tallying of adjectives (see Appendix C). Raters were debriefed in class. Only those words identified by all pairs of raters were used in Part II.

Part II

Sample. Participants were 50 individuals from three locations in a small metropolitan area: a train station, a bus terminal, and an airport. The sampling procedure involved approaching individuals who were sitting alone, waiting for their form of transportation to arrive. An effort was made to obtain a similar number of female (N=28) and male (N=22) participants, of diverse ages (18-20 years, 12%; 21-30 years, 22%; 31-40 years, 20%; 41-50 years, 34%; 51-60 years, 8%; 61+, 4%) and ethnicities [European American, 74%; African American, 8%; Hispanic American, 4%; Asian American, 2%; Native American/Alaskan Native, 2%; Other (this category offered participants the ability to describe their own ethnicity), 10%]. Participants had varied educational backgrounds (some grade school, 2%; some high school, 2%; high school graduates, 16%; some college, 38%; college graduate, 22%; some graduate/professional school, 4%;

graduate/professional school graduate, 16%). Sixty-two percent of the participants live in Rhode Island; 24 % live outside of Rhode Island but in the New England region; and 14% said they live elsewhere. Ninety percent of respondents primarily speak English, the other 10% use English as a second language. Individuals who agreed to participate were told about the study and asked to complete one practice rating scale (see Appendix D). Those who were unable to follow the instructions were excluded from the sample.

Instrument. The 20 most commonly used adjectives for female characters and the 20 most commonly used for male characters were identified by examining the mean number of times each adjective was recorded by the rating pairs in Part I. These adjectives were presented with Semantic Differential rating scales to each of the 50 participants.

The Semantic Differential scales, originally developed by Osgood, Suci, and Tannenbaum (1957), employ bipolar adjectives and seven-point rating scales. The respondent is asked to rate some idea, concept, or issue by checking off one of seven spaces between the bipolar adjectives. Test-retest reliability of the scale was determined by Osgood et al. to be .85. Factor-score analysis produced three factors: evaluation, potency, and activity. Average error of measurement (expected to be smaller when the instrument is more reliable) was much smaller in the evaluative scales than in either the potency or activity scales. Face validity, the extent to which the measure's "distinctions ... correspond with those which would be made by most observers without the aid of the instrument" (p. 141), was determined by asking participants whether discriminations made by the instrument correspond with his/her own judgments. The ratings of factors on the scales were found to reflect what is expected through common sense.

The three factors measured by the Semantic Differential, evaluation, potency, and activity, were included in the present study. A gender association scale was included as a fourth "factor". Evaluation was measured by five subscales (good-bad, pretty-ugly, friendly-unfriendly, healthy-sick, happy-sad). Potency was measured by three subscales (strong-weak, big-small, heavy-light). Activity was measured by three subscales (warm-cold, loud-quiet, moving-still). And gender association was measured by one scale (masculine-feminine). These twelve Semantic Differential rating scales were completed by participants for each adjective presented (40 in all). The scales were counterbalanced and the order of bipolar adjectives was varied to avoid practice effects and rating error.

Procedure. The researcher or her assistant approached individuals who were sitting alone in designated waiting areas in each of the three locations (train station, bus terminal, airport). The researcher or assistant indicated that she was recruiting individuals to participate in a study investigating the meaning of words. Individuals were asked if they had the time (approximately 20 minutes) and if they were interested in participating. Each individual who agreed was given a packet of materials (see Appendix D) that included: (a) a general description of research and informed consent form; (b) a demographic questionnaire; (c) one practice Semantic Differential scale; and (d) Semantic Differential scales (standardized instructions included) for the 40 adjectives. The participant was asked to complete the practice rating scale and show it to the researcher or assistant for feedback before attempting the actual data gathering scales. Those who were unable, after the practice attempt and instructional verbal feedback from the researcher/assistant, to complete the scales were debriefed and excused from the study. Each respondent was asked to answer the questions privately, and to return the materials to the researcher or assistant. Participants were then

debriefed by being given a one page description of the study and its purpose. Confidentiality was assured and informed consent forms were separated from the packets, so that responses could not be identified.

RESULTS

Part I

The prevalence of girls/women and boys/men in titles, central roles, and pictures in children's books was assessed by the researcher and her assistant who counted and recorded raw numbers of characters of each gender in each of the three categories. Differences were reconciled by recounting. Three $1 \times k$ (Goodness of Fit) Chi squares were performed (one for each category - titles, central roles, and pictures) to determine if girls/women are underrepresented in comparison to boys/men. This was done by comparing the observed data on female and male characters with an expected data set (based upon pure chance) to determine how well the observations "fit" the expectations.

A significant difference was found for characters in titles [$\chi^2(1) = 5.76$, $p < .05$] and in pictures [$\chi^2(1) = 130.10$, $p < .05$]. In our sample of books, male characters were mentioned significantly more often in titles than female characters (24:10), and male characters were seen significantly more often in pictures/illustrations than girls/women (1447:895). No difference was found between the number of male and female characters in central roles [$\chi^2(1) = 1.20$, $p > .05$]. (see Figure 1)

The 20 most commonly used adjectives for female characters were found to be different from the 20 most commonly used adjectives for male characters. (see Table 1)

Part II

From the participants' ratings of adjectives on the Semantic Differential scale, a score was obtained for each adjective on the factors of potency, activity, evaluation, and gender association. Four independent t-tests (one for each of the four factors) were conducted to determine if there was a significant difference in potency, evaluation, activity, and gender connotations of adjectives used to describe female and male characters.

All four of the calculated t-tests found significant differences. The male characters ($\bar{X} = 3.79$) were described with adjectives that are more potent (powerful) than those used for females ($\bar{X} = 4.20$) (note that in calculating results, 1 was designated as the highest score), $t(1998) = 7.13$, $p < .05$. Boys/men ($\bar{X} = 3.92$) were also described as more active than girls/women ($\bar{X} = 4.20$), $t(1998) = 3.62$, $p < .05$, and boys/men ($\bar{X} = 3.92$) were described more often than girls/women ($\bar{X} = 4.30$) with words associated with the concept of masculinity, $t(1998) = 7.89$, $p < .05$. The adjectives used for girls/women ($\bar{X} = 3.82$) were more positively evaluated than those used for boys/men ($\bar{X} = 4.09$), $t(1998) = 3.67$, $p < .05$, contrary to the prediction. (see Figure 2)

Each author's use of adjectives was then assessed. Comparisons were made between women and men authors in the use of female adjectives. For all authors, a score was calculated by subtracting the number of female adjectives for boy/men characters from the number of female adjectives for girl/women characters. The set of scores for women authors was compared to the set of scores for men authors using an independent t-test for samples of unequal size. Results show that there is no significant difference in the way that women and men authors use female adjectives to describe characters, $t(27) = 0.98$, $p > .05$. The same analysis was done to compare women and men authors on their use of male adjectives. Again, results confirm that there is no significant difference

between the groups in use of male adjectives to describe characters., $t(27) = -0.88$, $p > .05$.

DISCUSSION

Results of this research are consistent with the general pattern of gender bias found in other studies of children's picture books. There are two main findings from the present study. First, support was provided for the hypothesis that female and male characters are not represented equally. Female characters were found to be presented significantly less often in pictures and titles than were male characters, but no difference was found in the numbers of female and male characters presented in central roles. Second, results supported the hypothesis that there is a relationship between gender stereotypes and adjectives used by story authors for female and male characters. Different adjectives were used to describe female and male characters. Consistent with gender stereotypes, male characters were more often described as potent/powerful, active, and "masculine" than female characters. Not predicted was the finding that female characters were described by adjectives that were more positive in terms of evaluation than their male counterparts. No difference was found between female and male authors in their use of adjectives for female and male characters. These findings are discussed in the following sections: 1) Prevalence, 2) Descriptors, and 3) Gender of Author.

Prevalence

It has been approximately 22 years since the Weitzman, Eifler, Hokada, and Ross (1972) study and, since then, the frequency of girls/women in central roles in Caldecott books seems to have increased. Although equal representation has not yet been reached, that goal is being approached. The

same, however, cannot be said for story titles and pictures. Boys and men are still seen in significantly higher numbers than girls and women in both book illustrations and titles. If sexual equality existed in children's literature, female characters would be seen and represented in approximately half of the pictures and titles as well as in central roles.

That girls and women have increased in central roles may represent a concerted effort by authors to reduce the sexism in children's books. However, the present findings suggest a type of modern discrimination, most often studied in relation to racism. In modern discrimination, the overt behaviors expressed through feelings of prejudice toward a certain group have changed, but the underlying problem remains. The feelings of prejudice continue to exist, but surface in more safe, socially acceptable ways, which are often difficult to identify (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986; Katz, Hackenhut, & Hass, 1986). This subtle form of discrimination can be seen through analogy in the results of the present study. By identifying central role as the overt aspect, the category where gender stereotyping/sexism would most easily be recognized, and by identifying titles and pictures as categories through which expression is more subtle, sexist discrimination can be seen in the present findings. Authors are attempting to make changes in what's obvious, what's most easily seen. However, in order to eliminate sexism from children's books, attention also needs to be drawn to the more subtle forms of bias, in this case re-examining the disproportionately high number of male characters represented in titles and pictures.

Descriptors

One of the main goals of this study was to examine the more subtle aspects of gender stereotyping in children's literature through the use of differential language. So rather than investigate characters' roles, activities,

occupations, etc., this study instead focused on the text of the books. In particular, the actual adjectives used to describe characters were examined.

To begin with, the adjective descriptors used for female and male characters were found to be different. Some of the most commonly used adjectives to describe females were found to be beautiful, frightened, worthy, sweet, weak, and scared. Among the most commonly used adjectives to describe male characters were big, horrible, fierce, great, terrible, furious, brave, and proud.

The adjectives used to describe male characters were judged by a sample of adults as being more potent (or powerful), more active, and more often associated with the concept of masculinity than the adjectives used to describe female characters. This is consistent with past studies in which males in children's books were found in dominant, independent, outdoor, heroic, and competitive roles with females "playing second fiddle" in helper, caretaker, dependent, passive, and domestic roles (Charnes et al., 1980; Key, 1971; Kortenhaus & Demarest, 1993; McDonald, 1989; Marten & Matlin, 1976; Rachlin & Vogt, 1974; Weitzman et al., 1972).

The adjectives used for female characters were rated as more positively evaluative than those used for male characters. This finding is inconsistent with past research which found girls/women in devalued roles (Moore & Mae, 1987; Rachlin & Vogt, 1974; Weitzman et al., 1972). Devalued roles and devalued descriptions, however, may not be comparable. Female characters in past studies have been found in devalued roles, occupations, and activities, but they were not necessarily described with negative evaluation. The present findings clearly indicate that females are described with words that connote positive evaluation. It may be that females are being described more positively when they

fulfill stereotyped roles. This is a question that should be examined in a future study.

Gender of Author

The present findings indicate that female and male authors do not differ in their use of descriptors for characters in children's picture books. This variable has seldom been studied in investigations of gender stereotyping in children's literature. One exception was the landmark study by Weitzman et al. (1972). They did not actually analyze their sample of books by gender of author, but did look at the percentage of female and male authors. They found a high percentage (41% in Caldecott Award winners; 58% in Newbury Award winners) of female authorship, and noted the irony that "many of these books are written by prize winning female authors whose own lives are probably unlike those they advertise" (p.1146).

Collins, Ingoldsby, and Dellman (1984) did examine gender of author as a variable and found that of five female authors, three were responsible for writing sexist books while two wrote non-sexist books. In comparison, of 11 male authors, four were responsible for writing sexist books, while seven wrote non-sexist books. They concluded that male authors were making a more conscious effort to eliminate sexism from children's literature.

The present findings indicate that female and male authors do not differ in their presentations of female and male characters. Both fall into the trap of gender stereotyping when describing the behavior and attributes of girls/women and boys/men.

Considerations

Although the sample of books examined was small, it is a sample of award-winning books, to be admired and emulated. Information presented through these books is held in high regard. Other books not so well identified are

held to different expectations, although authors may try to model those that are recognized as award-winners. Therefore, the award-winners should present an image that is an accurate and appropriate representation of human beings in our society, focusing on individual differences rather than on gender differences.

In addition, the effect of different forms of media (i.e., literature versus television) remains unknown. Gender stereotyping has been found in both, but is there a differential impact from varying forms of media? Children experience television passively, but the same cannot be said for reading. Just the opposite, reading, comprehension, and interpretation of literature are very active processes, involving the imagination. Even for young children who are not able to read, the experience of having a book read to them is an active process as well as an interactive process with the parent or reader. These variables must be considered in the acquisition of gender stereotypes.

Implications

The results of this study provide evidence that gender categories are created and maintained through the use of differential language. Although women all over the world are breaking traditional stereotypes, this is clearly not reflected in children's literature. We are not presenting to our children an accurate picture of contemporary life. Instead, we present a model that teaches our daughters and sons their different places.

Language can serve as a vehicle to perpetuate *or abandon* stereotypes. Editors, publishers, directors, producers, teachers, and parents, those in positions of power, able to induce change, have to take on the responsibility of doing so.

Past studies have examined the roles of characters in children's picture books for evidence of gender stereotyping. The type of roles, occupations, and activities, whether performed in or outside of the home, were the focus of investigation. The present study differs from past research in that the actual

words used to describe characters were the focus of investigation. This study has taken the search for gender stereotyping in children's literature to a new level, one where more subtle aspects may be examined.

The present study also differs from past research in terms of methodology. Prior studies of children's literature have mainly been qualitative, conducted through content analysis. The present study combines both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, allowing for a more complex analysis of the data. It used a systematic procedure to relate the ratings of one variable to another. Comparisons were made between adjective use, adjective meaning, and authors' use of adjectives for female and male characters in children's books. Therefore, this research can be described as relational, where past studies were more often descriptive.

New questions have been generated by this study. First, evaluation of characters, both female and male, needs to be explored, particularly within a context of comparison to role value. For instance, are female characters being described more positively because they are fulfilling stereotyped roles? Second, the research question investigated in the present study may be used in investigating a wider sample of children's picture books or in other areas of media. For example, descriptions of female and male characters on television cartoons may be evaluated for gender stereotyping through the use of differential language. Next, the format for this study may be expanded to include other variables. For instance, what words are used to describe ethnic minorities in the literature? Is there a compound effect with gender stereotyping? Has there been change over time? Furthermore, responsibility of publishers and award-grantors must be examined. What are the guidelines used by publishers and the American Library Association to ensure equal gender representation in the literature? Are they aware of the subtle aspects of gender stereotyping found in

books they rank as "the best" in children's literature? If so, are they prepared to change their definition of "the best" to include books that accurately represent real people?

It is apparent that "curious Jane" does not appear in the literature reviewed in this study. Of great importance is the need to elevate the standards for female characters in children's picture books to match that of the real world. In an effort to increase awareness of those in positions to effect change, the results of this study will be sent to the American Library Association for their consideration.

Appendix A

Sample of Caldecott Medal and Honors Books

<i>Year</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Author</i>
MEDAL BOOKS:		
1994	Grandfather's Journey	Allen Say
1993	Mirette on the High Wire	Emily A. McCully
1992	Tuesday *	David Wiesner
1991	Black and White	David Macaulay
1990	Lon Po Po: A Red Riding Hood Story from China	Ed Young
1989	Song and Dance Man	Karen Ackerman
1988	Owl Moon	Jane Yolen
1987	Hey, Al	Arthur Yorinks
1986	The Polar Express	Chris Van Allsbury
1985	St. George and the Dragon	Margaret Hodges
1984	The Glorious Flight: Across the Channel with Louis Bleriot	Alice Provensen Martin Provensen

HONORS BOOKS:

1994	Peppe the Lamplighter	Elisa Bartone
	In the Small, Small Pond *	Denise Fleming
	Owen	Kevin Henkes
	Raven: A Trickster Tale from the Pacific Northwest	Gerald McDermott

	Yo! Yes? *	Chris Raschka
1993	Seven Blind Mice *	Ed Young
	The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales	Jon Scieszka
	Working Cotton	Sherley A. Williams
1992	Tar Beach	Faith Ringgold
1991	Puss in Boots	Charles Perrault
	"More, more, more," said the Baby: 3 Love Stories	Vera Williams
1990	Color Zoo *	Lois Ehlert
	Herschel and the Hanukkah Goblins	Eric Kimmel
	Bill Peet: An Autobiography *	Bill Peet
	The Talking Eggs	Robert San Souci
1989	Mirandy and Brother Wind	Patricia McKissack
	Goldilocks and the Three Bears	James Marshall
	The Boy of the Three Year Nap	Dianne Snyder
	Free Fall *	David Wiesner
1988	Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters: An African Tale	John Steptoe
1987	The Village of Round and Square Houses	Ann Grifalconi
	Alphabetics *	Suse MacDonald
	Rumpelstiltskin	Paul Zelinsky
1986	The Relatives Came *	Cynthia Rylant
	King Bidgood's in the Bathtub *	Audrey Wood
1985	Hansel and Gretel	Rika Lesser

	The Story of Jumping Mouse	John Steptoe
	Have you seen my Duckling? *	Nancy Tafuri
1984	Ten, Nine, Eight	Molly Bang
	Little Red Riding Hood	Trina S. Hyman

** Eliminated from sample due to lack of words or adjectives.*

Standardized Instructions

For this study, you will be asked to identify and record adjectives from a number of children's picture books. Educational information on adjectives will be provided by the researcher. For each book analyzed, you will be provided with a standard form which will have the title of each book listed on top, along with a space for the character's name for whom you will be recording adjectives. Therefore, you will usually have more than one standard form per book (as there is typically more than one character per book). Please record adjectives for only one character at a time. Follow the instructions provided on the standard form when recording adjectives. You will be working with a partner, so you should be making decisions together for what "constitutes" an adjective. You will be given practice using one standard form. The practice will focus on only one book and one character.

Educational Information on Adjectives

An adjective describes or modifies a noun or pronoun. Adjectives can be common or proper. Proper adjectives are created from proper nouns and are capitalized.

Example: *Little* people peek through *big* steering wheels.

(*Little* modifies people; *big* modifies steering wheels.)

More than one adjective may modify the same noun or pronoun.

Example: Trout gobble up the *small, soft, round* eggs.

Some adjectives follow a form of the verb be (a linking verb), and describe the subject.

Example: Roses are *beautiful*.

(*Beautiful* modifies roses.)

Adjectives have three forms: positive, comparative, and superlative.

(1) The positive form describes a noun or pronoun without comparing it to anyone or anything else.

Example: Superman is *tough*.

(2) The comparative form (-er) compares two persons, places, things, or ideas.

Example: Tarzan is *tougher* than Superman.

or

Tarzan is *more wonderful* than Superman.

(3) The superlative form (-est) compares three or more persons, places, things, or ideas.

Example: But I, Big Bird, am the *toughest* of all!

or

But I, Big Bird, am the *most wonderful* of all!

Practice for Recording Adjectives

(use standard form provided)

Walt was tough and businesslike as he leaned out on the edge of his chair scowling at the boards. The atmosphere was getting pretty grim until John Foulfellow, a villainous fox, was introduced on the boards. Walt's mood changed in a flash and suddenly he was the sly, debonair fox, overacting the part to perfection.

After seeing the gruff, overbearing Walt it was a refreshing turnabout to see the playful Walt in action. His exaggerated attitudes were truly funny and he had us laughing all the way. Exaggeration is the very essence of animation, so necessary to creating larger-than-life personalities.

After the fox performance Walt reverted to his bearish ways, grumbling about the surplus material, all the wasted time and money. Leo didn't make it halfway through his presentation of Bogyland before Walt called a halt.

(Bill Peet, 1989, pp.104-106)

Appendix C

Standard Form Used for Recording Character Descriptions

TITLE OF BOOK: _____

CHARACTER NAME: _____

Please list all of the ***adjectives*** in the book that describe the above-named character. Use a tally mark next to the adjective to indicate the number of times it appears in the text in description of the named character. Use the space provided below (go on to the following page if you need more space).

adjective:**tally**

(example)

curious

||||

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

9. _____

10. _____

11. _____

12. _____

13. _____

14. _____

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18. _____
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33. _____
34. _____
35. _____
36. _____
37. _____
38. _____
39. _____
40. _____

Appendix D

Study Packet: Informed Consent, Standardized Instructions, Demographic Survey, Semantic Differential Scale

- 1) Informed Consent
- 2) Standardized Instructions
- 3) Demographic Survey
- 4) Semantic Differential Scale

Informed Consent

The University of Rhode Island

Department of Psychology

Chafee Building

Kingston, Rhode Island 02881

CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH

I have been asked to take part in the research project described below. The researcher will explain the project to me in detail. I should feel free to ask questions. If I have more questions later, Diane Turner-Bowker, the said person responsible for this study, (401-792-2193), will discuss them with me.

I have been asked to take part in a study which will investigate the meaning of words. I will be asked to answer a survey; it will take approximately 30 minutes to complete.

Although there is no direct benefit to me for taking part in this study, the researcher may learn more about the meaning of words.

My part in this study is strictly confidential. None of the information will identify me by name.

The decision whether or not to take part in this study is up to me. I do not have to participate. If I decide to take part in this study, I may quit at any time.

If I am not satisfied with the way this study is performed, I may discuss my complaints with Diane Turner-Bowker, anonymously, if I choose. In addition, I may contact the office of the Vice Provost for Research, 70 Lower College Road, University of Rhode Island, telephone (401) 792-2635.

I have read the Consent Form. My questions have been answered. My signature on this form means that I understand the information and I agree to participate in this study.

Signature of Participant

Signature of Researcher

Typed/printed Name

Typed/printed Name

Date

Date

Demographic Information

Please answer the following questions by placing a check-mark on the appropriate response:

Gender: female_____ male_____

Age (years): 18-20_____ 21-30_____ 31-40_____ 41-50_____

51-60_____ 61-70_____ 70+_____

Ethnicity: European American (Caucasian)_____

African American_____

Hispanic American (Latino/Latina)_____

Asian American_____

American Indian/Alaskan Native_____

Other (please describe)_____

Education completed (Check the single highest level completed):

some grade school_____

grade school graduate_____

some high school_____

high school graduate_____

some college_____

college graduate_____

some graduate/professional_____

graduate/professional_____

Primary language:_____

spoken?_____

written?_____

City and State of residence:_____

Standardized Instructions

The purpose of this study is to measure the *meaning* of words by having people judge them against a series of descriptive scales. In taking this test, please make your judgments on the basis of what these words mean to you. On each page of this booklet, you will find a different concept to be judged and beneath it a set of scales. You are to rate the concept in each of these scales in order.

Here is how you are to use these scales:

If you feel that the concept at the top of the page is *very closely related* to one end of the scale, you should place your check-mark as follows:

strong _____:_____:_____:_____:_____:_____weak

or

strong _____:_____:_____:_____:_____:_____weak

If you feel that the concept is *quite closely related* to one or the other end of the scale (but not extremely), you should place your check-mark as follows:

strong _____:_____:_____:_____:_____:_____weak

or

strong _____:_____:_____:_____:_____:_____weak

If you feel that the concept is *only slightly related* to one side as opposed to the other side (but is really not neutral), then you should check as follows:

strong _____:_____:_____:_____:_____:_____weak

or

strong _____:_____:_____:_____:_____:_____weak

The direction which you check, of course, depends upon which of the two ends of the scale seem most characteristic of the concept you are judging.

If you consider the concept to be *neutral* on the scale, both sides of the scale *equally associated* with the concept, or if the scale is *completely irrelevant*, unrelated to the concept, then you should place your check-mark in the middle space:

strong _____:_____:_____:_____:_____:_____:_____weak

IMPORTANT:

- (1) Place your check-marks in the *middle of the spaces*, not on the boundaries:

this not this

_____:_____:_____:_____:_____:_____:_____

- (2) Be sure you check every scale for every concept -- *do not omit any*.
- (3) Never put more than one check-mark on a single scale.

Sometimes you may feel as though you've had the same item before on the test. This will not be the case, so *do not look back and forth* through the items. Do not try to remember how you checked similar items earlier in the test. *Make each item a separate and independent judgment. **Work at a very high speed through this test.*** Do not worry or puzzle over individual items. There are no right or wrong answers. It is your first impressions, the immediate "feelings" about the items that we want. On the other hand, please do not be careless, because we want your true impressions.

Example of Semantic Differential Scales

beautiful

good _____ bad

ugly _____ pretty

unfriendly _____ friendly

healthy _____ sick

sad _____ happy

strong _____ weak

small _____ big

light _____ heavy

warm _____ cold

loud _____ quiet

still _____ moving

feminine _____ masculine

Table 1

20 Most Commonly Used Adjectives for Female and for Male Characters

Female Adjectives	Frequency	Male Adjectives	Frequency
old	29	little	43
little	24	old	30
beautiful	17	young	15
good	9	fat	15
frightened	8	big	9
poor	7	hungry	9
worthy	7	horrible	8
sweet	6	ugly	7
happy	6	fierce	7
dear	5	great	6
ugly	5	small	6
young	4	poor	5
weak	4	tired	5
angry	4	terrible	5
heart-loving	3	sad	5
wicked	3	furious	4
small	3	happy	4
sick	3	brave	4
kind	3	good	4
scared	3	proud	4

Figure Caption

Figure 1. Prevalence of female and male characters in titles, pictures, and central roles.

Figure Caption

Figure 2. Adjectives for female and male characters on the factors of potency, activity, evaluation, and gender association.

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