Sex Stereotyping in Children's Literature

An Honors Thesis (ID 499)

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I. OVERVIEW AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Tom and Betty. Dick and Jane. Peter and Wendy.

What do all these characters have in common? According to some critics, these seemingly innocuous characters teach children outmoded sex-role stereotypes. They teach girls that being feminine means being passive and dependent and that to be masculine, boys must be assertive and active. Betty and Jane and others show children that girls are second class citizens, rating below boys on intelligence, initiative and importance, and that their purpose in life is to grow up to be good wives and mothers - not surgeons and executives (Rudman, 1976, Berger, 1977, Nilsen, 1971, Nightengale, 1972). The purpose of this paper is to look at children's literature and the role it plays in children's development and to critically evaluate the impact that this literature is having on today's children.

It is unclear exactly how much of a role literature plays in the development of sex role identity in children, but obviously it is one factor in the child's learning process. During identity forming years (from pre-school to adolescence), exposure to story characters provides information on behaviors and roles which the child can incorporate into his or her behavioral repertoire (Nilsen, 1971). Exposure begins early, with the first fairy tales, nursery rhymes, and picture books. The initial characterizations of what is masculine and what is feminine are repeated and reinforced throughout childhood,
staying with the child as he reads his first reader, his math-
books, history books, great classics, etc. Those stereotypes are
reflections of society's standards and mirror the culture which
produces them (Nilsen, 1971).

Today's society is supposedly liberated and relaxed. Yet
one would never suspect this from reviewing what children are
reading. Yes, it is true that Jane now wears shorts and that
Nancy Drew dresses in jeans and can sail a boat, but neither
wants to go to college for a professional career or knows how
to fix a car.

Both society and children's literature are ambivalent
today. Society sends out mixed messages to women and men
concerning women: "Today's Army wants you" and "My wife, I
think I'll keep her." Children's literature does the same thing.
Children are not taught outright that boys are better than
girls and that girls belong safely at home, but the books tend
to show this. There are more stories about males, more male
main characters and more men and boys doing things (Stewig, 1973,
Nilsen, 1971). Girls, when present, watch boys, make mistakes
and are looked after by their brothers or fathers. Mothers
wear aprons, stay inside, cook, clean and shop. They seldom
have jobs. Fathers work outside the home, drive cars, and do
active things with the children outside. (Mother watches from
the kitchen window or porch). Through exposure to these tradi-
tional role stereotypes, girls limit their own self-perceptions
and aspirations (Ashby, 1978).

Evidence for this was gathered in an experiment conducted
by Marilee Ashby (1978). She had grade-school age girls read
stories with traditional (e.g. secretarial, teaching, nursing, etc.) and nontraditional (occupations traditionally considered masculine) roles being filled by women. When tested with an adjective test check list, a picture choice test, and job check lists, it was found that girls reading nontraditional stories rated many more traditionally masculine jobs as appropriate for women than did the girls who had read the traditional stories. Ashby felt that these results indicated that the effect of sexually stereotyped children's books on girls, over a long period of time, could be major. Through such exposure, girls are taught to be noncompetitive and to orient themselves toward service occupations such as teaching, nursing, and secretarial work. They do not challenge men in the more competitive and prestigious job areas, which are considered traditionally masculine.

Besides being limiting, girls' stories inhibit imagination and action more than boy's stories (Nightingale, 1972). Girls' adventures are social extravaganzas - tea parties, balls, sewing bees. Boys' adventures roam to many places and include many activities. Physical endurance and skill are necessary in boys' stories; in girls' they are unexpected and unnecessary (Nightingale, 1972). Girls are typically portrayed as being emotional and impulsive. Feminine intuition is used to explain any chance appearance of logic in a female's thinking process.

Publishers give various explanations for the biased and stereotyped view of the female in their literature; three such reasons seem especially pertinent. One is that these stories portray reality, since girls do live less adventurous lives than
boys (cited by Tavris, 1977). This may have been true in the past, but its validity today is questionable. Maybe these books themselves are responsible for creating girls who are more prone to stay at home; maybe this tendency is socialized into them, not inborn. Another typically cited explanation is that only girls will read about girls, but both boys and girls will read about boys (cited by Rudman, 1976 and Nilsen, 1971). Critics point out that perhaps the reason that boys don't read about girls is that girls are stereotypically limited in their behaviors and actions, resulting in less interesting stories. Also, boys may not be reinforced for reading girls' stories. A final reason is that, in general, girls read better than boys and it is boys who are more prone to need remedial reading. Therefore a conscious attempt has been made to appeal to boys' interest in an attempt to get them to read more.

Within the bounds of her stereotyped image, the female character has evolved over the past hundred years. The basic stereotypes of today are not unique to our era. From the 1800's and Victorian period, "uplifting fiction" has been aimed at females - encouraging their view of themselves as eventual wives and mothers, keeping them counting their blessings, doing their duty, and maintaining the established structure of society. (Cadogen, 1976). The stories of the times stressed docility, morality, maidenliness and acceptance of subordination. Characteristic titles were *Abbey Church*, or *Self Control and Self Conceit*, and *The Daisy Chain*, or *Aspirations*. Heroines embodied the patriarchial, moralistic, and class-ridden spirit of the age. A typical storyline included a self-sacrificing, saintly heroine dying a martyred death in a vivid and ornate
condescension and made allowances for their sisters' and cousins' weaker mentalities.

The 1930's led to wider horizons for girls, with the creation of career books in which girls "did things." There were just two major professions - girl reporter and girl detective (nursing not being considered glamorous yet), but they did increases girls' options. This expansion was not complete; the books were still hedged with compromise, traditional and sentimental dialogues, and conventional endings with weddings, but they offered an alternative to the rigidly stereotyped literature that was major fare. In the forties authors did some back-tracking, focusing on animal stories, stressing kindness to animals and supressing the themes of women's achievement and competition in the man's world (Cadogan, 1976). The fifties followed suit, with girls portrayed as being where they "belonged": in full skirts, protecting animals and small children, looking dainty and not challenging boys.

Today's stories have evolved into a freer form, with girls and boys both having more options for appropriate behaviors. Still, there are many carry-overs of sexist characterizations from earlier periods existing today. Traditional stories (classics, fairy tales, nursery rhymes) have not changed since the time they were written and consequently strongly reflect the norms of the society in which they were composed. Modern stories with trite or typical plots still present these narrow views. Because of these inconsistencies, today's child is presented with an ambiguous and confusing picture of what is and is not appropriate behavior. Women are presented as both inferior
humans and as men's equals. Sometimes they are allowed to be active and intelligent, but often they are not. The female image is in a state of flux. It is still strongly locked in the set patterns of the past, but new patterns are becoming more frequent.

II. REPRESENTATIONS OF WOMEN IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE
FAIRY TALES AND NURSERY RHYMES

Children's first exposure to literature usually takes the form of fairy tales, nursery rhymes, and picture books. Though introduced early, they stay with the child throughout youth and adolescence, providing constant and stable models. These forms are usually simplistic, and lean heavily on definite, rigid sexism (Rudman, 1976). Girls are feminine, boys are masculine, and few ambiguities are allowed. Good and bad, beautiful and ugly, wise and stupid are all clearly separated. These books (especially fairy tales) focus on two types of women: the passive female, who is viewed sympathetically, and the assertive female, who is not (Dolan, 1972). The passive female tends either to be a little old lady - ineffectual, eccentric, and befuddled -- or a beautiful, young heroine who is helplessly dependent, dull-witted, spiritless, passive, and naive. The little old women - the old woman in the shoe, the red riding hood grandmother, Mother Goose, Old Mother Hubbard, are, according to Dan Dolan, "A ludicrous bunch -- with their brooms, flying geese, hysterics and inane rituals..." (1972). They pose no threat to men and seldom embrace reality. The beautiful heroine is a standard. There is Snow White, who is stupid (How many times did she let the witch in after being especially warned to beware of her?), Cinderella, who is spiritless (She could have told her
stepmother to leave her alone), passive Rapunzel, locked in a
tower by a scrawny old woman for 16 years, and naive Sleeping
Beauty, who didn't know a spinning wheel when she saw one and
uttered such inanities as "My Prince, it has taken you so long
to come" to a total stranger. Aside from being beautiful, good,
and slightly scatterbrained, the heroine is often poor or
deprived and seems to exist in an emotional vacuum. Feelings
the heroine has for her hero, or the hero has for her, are never
expressed or apparent. The heroine is similar to a lobotomized
kitten, wide-eyed and fluffy, but totally empty inside. It is
ture that children find these characters to be appealing. They
do not view these heroines critically, analyzing their characteris-
tics for flaws. However, from an objective (though admittedly
adult) point of view, these women often do come up lacking. They
are not realistic in today's terms nor are they good role models
for developing children.

The assertive women in fairy tales are typically bad guys.
The domineering housewife, the cruel stepmother, the witch -
all are threats to decency and safety in the fairy tale world
(Dolan, 1972). They are ugly; warts are practically prerequisite.
They are in control of the environment, but usually in a male-
volent way. Examples of such characters are the witch in "Snow
White", the evil fairy in "Sleeping Beauty", the evil stepmother
in "Cinderella", and the witch and mother in "Hansel and Gretel."
It is noteworthy that these characters have no names. These
women are more shrewd than the female victims, but less in-
telligent than their male antagonists. There is usually a detest-
able character flaw associated with them: cannibalism (the witch
in "Hansel and Gretel"), vanity (the stepmother/witch in "Snow
White"), sadism (just about any assertive woman in Grimm's fairy tales) and vengefulness (Dolan, 1972). These women are all ultimately punished by the males and earn their just deserts for threatening the male sex. In addition, they are seldom left intact: they melt, explode, or are blown away.

There are few powerful good women in fairy tales - a couple of godmothers, a few whimsical fairies. Usually these women are asexual and old. Women who are good and powerful are never human. Attractive and powerful good women are rare and usually function only in a maternal, helpful role. Examples of such females are the good witch in the Wizard of Oz and the Blue Fairy in "Pinnochio." Those women who are human and have or seek power are nearly always portrayed as repulsive (e.g. Cinderella's stepmother) (Lieberman, 1972).

Many common patterns are found in fairy tales. These themes reoccur consistently and become standard truths for children. Some of these principles include the stepmother, who is infallibly wicked; the beauty contest, in which the most beautiful daughter is singled out for a reward; the fact that beautiful girls are never ignored; that there is a special destiny for the youngest child; beauty being recognized as a girl's most valuable asset; good temper and meekness are associated with beauty, ill temper with ugliness; beautiful girls don't need to do anything to merit being chosen; marriage being seen as the major event in a girl's life; the focus being put on courtship, not married life; marriage being associated with getting rich; and seeing poor boys playing an active role in winning kingdoms and princesses, while poor (but beautiful) girls must wait to be chosen by their princes (Lieberman, 1972).
The system of rewards in fairy tales equates three factors − being beautiful, being chosen, and getting rich (Lieberman, 1972).

Nursery rhymes reflect many of the same themes about females − ineffectiveness, stupidity, silliness, pettiness. The old women, as already mentioned (Dolan, 1972), are ridiculous − Mother Goose and her gander, the old woman and her shoe, the woman in the basket sweeping the cobwebs out of the sky. Younger females such as Mistress Mary, Little Bo Peep and Miss Muffet present such traits as contrariness, ineffectiveness, and irrational fearfulness as their outstanding qualities. Children learn a wide range of human frailities from these rhymes and attribute many of them to females.

Together fairy tales and nursery rhymes present a warped view of female nature. If the character isn't running in fear of a spider, she's scrubbing a hearth, lying in a trance-like sleep, preparing for a royal ball or fixing breakfast for seven little men. She never composes sonnets, contemplates anything, or goes to the office. She seldom goes outside unless she is lost in the forest. This is the general view of fairy tales − that they limit and demean women. There is some disagreement, however. Alison Lurie (1970) feels that having powerful female antagonists and female main characters may be a legacy of a long lost matriarchial society which had a more positive view of women. This may be true. However even having women in dominant roles does not necessarily indicate that the roles are positive and show women in a good light. The roles are often narrow and illustrate neuroticism, stupidity and narcissism rather than qualities of healthy and intelligent people.
Picture books often provide a contemporary setting for children to assimilate sex role characteristics. Whether set in modern times, past, or fantasy settings, characterization is relayed through both words and pictures. This allows the child to actually see, as well as mentally visualize, the characters. In the case of sex-role stereotyping, this allows a more vivid and potentially rigid image to be presented. Many studies have been done on the types of sex-role images presented in children's picture books (Stewig, 1973, Fisher, 1974, Weitsman, 1972, Women on Words and Images, 1974, Nilsen, 1971). Typical results indicate that women are underrepresented in such books and are only portrayed as participating in a narrow range of behaviors. One such study conducted by John Stewig found that from 154 randomly selected picture books, only 65% contained female characters. Of those containing female characters, 83% showed women in homemaker roles and 17% in working roles. The working roles included teachers, maids and nuns. Similar results were obtained by Alleen Pace Nilsen (1971). In the 58 picture books she examined, only 25 had a picture of a woman somewhere in them. Of those 25, all but four contained pictures of women wearing aprons. These results led her to research the issue more thoroughly and systematically. She chose to review the winners and runners-up of the Caldecott Award, an award presented annually for the most distinguished picture book written that year, feeling that these award-winning books simultaneously reflected adult values and influenced the formation of early childhood values. Through this review she determined that in the titles,
fourteen males and only four females, were listed by name. In illustrations, 579 males and only 386 females were pictured. All of the books contained a male, but in six females were completely absent. Roughly one quarter of the stories contained only minor, token females - mothers who fixed sandwiches, girls who watched from doorways, etc. These females were characterized as being inobtrusive and inactive (Nilsen, 1971).

Books that have animal characters usually portray them as being male. The characters of Maurice Sendak and Dr. Suess are primarily male. Personifications of inanimate objects and machines are almost always masculine. Virginia Lee Burton's character of Mary Anne the steam shovel is the one notable exception to this rule.

General conclusions agreed upon by all researchers indicate that picture books are read to children when they are most impressionable. They provide the child with some of his first information in appropriate sex role behaviors and heavily influence subsequent views of appropriate behaviors. Women are underrepresented in titles, central roles, and illustrations in picture books. When they appear, their characters are stereotyped - they are passive, inconspicuous, insignificant and are followers rather than leaders. Adult males and females are equally sex stereotyped. Males fill many occupational roles; females are usually wives and mothers. Females are identified and gain status through their relationships with males (someone's sister, wife, or mother) (Weitzman, 1972). This representation of women may create difficulties in the identity development of the young girl. If she continually sees that the boy does all the explaining, running, and rescuing while the girl does all
listening, watching and getting stuck, she may have problems in forming an identity image other than that of a housewife. Nilsen (1971) feels that "If she accepts the placid role of the female as shown in some recent picture books, then she runs the risk of becoming an unhappy person." She also has a hard time finding models for non-traditional roles; thus the girl is caught in a bind.

CHILDREN'S READERS AND TEXTBOOKS

As the child matures, the next common source of literary stereotyping is found in elementary school readers and textbooks. At the early elementary level, the child is introduced to Dick and Jane, Tom and Betty, or their equivalents, as main characters in beginning readers. Through them, the child learns several interesting facts about his world:

- The typical American family consists of a mother who doesn't work, a father who does, two children - an older brother and a younger sister, and two pets (a male dog that belongs to the boy and a female cat that belongs to the girl).

- Boys build, paint, don't care how they look, are resourceful and clever.

- Girls carry purses to the store, are incompetent, express fear three times more often than boys, and admire their older brothers.

- Girls often wear dresses even when pants would be more appropriate.

- Mothers seldom leave the house except to shop or go on family outings.

- Fathers instigate the family outings. Mothers pack the food.
Fathers fix things. Mothers use them.

(gathered from Howe, 1971, Women on Words and Images, 1974, and Rudman, 1976)

None of the family members exist in the real world.

Neither girls nor boys are permitted a realistic range of human expression - boys can't be emotional, girls can't be aggressive (Women on Words and Images, 1974). The parents seldom interact with each other and physical displays of affection between them are not allowed. The mother seldom does anything for herself; all her actions are family oriented. The children seldom help her, or if they do, the help is sporadic. The mother doesn't mind this; she is the perfect servant and finds happiness in washing, cooking, cleaning, nursing and finding lost mittens. The father is the "good guy." He takes the children places, makes them things and solves their problems (Women on Words and Images, 1974).

A survey conducted by Women on Words and Images (1974) on 2,760 elementary school stories established that there were ratios of five boy-centered stories for every two girl-centered stories. There were three adult male main characters for every adult female main character. Six male biographies were written for every female biography. There were two male animal stories to every female animal story, and four male folk/fantasy stories for every female story of the same type.

Masculine and feminine characterizations were clearly defined. Boys were ingenious, clever, creative, resourceful, intelligent, witty, persevering, industrious, strong, brave, heroic, competitive and independent. Girls were docile, fearful, incompetent, passive, dependent, had limited goals and often
acted stupidly. (Women on Words and Images, 1974). Girls who did not incorporate these characteristics and were still viewed positively were considered exceptions to the rule, rather than normal girls evincing normal characteristics. Gender terminology was used as a means of underlining or indicating characteristics in animals or inanimate things; for example, soft, fluffy kittens are females, whereas boisterous, playful dogs are males (Women on Words and Images, 1974).

This sex stereotyping is not confined to reading books in the school systems. Science and math books, social studies books, and history books also contain stereotypic sex-role information.

In America, science and math are considered to be masculine areas (Nilsen, 1971). Through the procedure of tracking, boys are encouraged to grow up to be scientists and mathematicians, while girls are channeled in other directions. This process is begun early and evidence of its presence is found in children's first math books. In math story problems, boys get primary attention. They solve the interesting problems and have many and varied experiences. Girls are confined to determining measuring equivalents in cooking and sewing. They are mentioned less often boys and appear fewer times in the stories.

Elementary social studies books have most of the sex bias problems common to reading books—women are under-represented, ignored, and are not considered to be members of America's labor force (Howe, 1971). Boys are still older than girls and have to explain things to their little sisters. High school history textbooks teach the same lessons, primarily by omission (Racism and Sexism Resource Center for Educators, 1977). Women are not seen as having taken any part in United States history
(one wonders if they were even there). These books omit many important females, while minimizing the legal, social and cultural disabilities they faced. Females are depicted in passive roles, with their lives being determined by economic and political trends. They are seldom shown fighting for anything; any rights they obtain are given to them. Quotes used are from male leaders, even though many comparable female leaders may have existed (Trecker, 1974).

According to a survey conducted by Janice Law Trecker (1974) of over a dozen of today's most popular high school history textbooks, women are under-represented in all phases of history. In the colonial to early federal period, women average about one to two paragraphs of information on their social and legal positions. Usually the only women mentioned by name are Anne Hutchinson and Pocahontas. Women get the most coverage in sections concerning women's rights and suffrage. A full page is a rarity, with three paragraphs being more common. After the 19th Amendment, subsequent civil rights and problems are ignored. In sections dealing with the 1920's, more attention is payed to the flapper than to the suffragette. Carrie Nation is given more prominence than more serious and stable reformers. Women's view of temperence is not put into perspective - no emphasis is put on the severe problems posed by alcoholism, the fact that women had few legal rights, and that if a woman left her husband during this era, she lost custody of her children. No mention is ever made of Margaret Sanger and her crusade for birth control; certainly a relevant issue in today's overpopulated world.

Janice Law Trecker summarized this lack of completeness by compiling the information about women found in the common U.S.
History textbook of today. The results indicate that, according to historical literature,

Women arrived in 1619 (a curious choice if meant to be their first acquaintance with the new world). They held the Seneca Falls Convention on Women's Rights in 1848. During the rest of the nineteenth century, they participated in reform movements, chiefly temperance, and were exploited in factories. In 1920 they were given the right to vote. They joined the armed forces for the first time during the second World War and thereafter have enjoyed the good life in America.

(Trecker, 1974)

Many facts are omitted about women and their role in history. It is often overlooked that many early European settlers were women, that Native American women often yielded considerable power within their own societies, that women played key roles in the Revolutionary and Civil Wars and that, during the industrial revolution, the female labor force was especially exploited. It is omitted that female social reformers had a significant impact on many aspects of urban life (Racism and Sexism Resource Center for Educators, 1977). These omissions and under-emphasis of female achievements pervade the textual literature which children are exposed to and aid in the formation of sex stereotyped views of women and their importance in the United State's past and present.

CHILDREN'S FICTION

When the child reaches elementary school age and has mastered rudimentary reading skills, a whole new world opens for him or her. He or she is able to read books independently and has a wide variety of books from which to choose. Children's fiction is a large market, with choices from beginning reading books to great illustrated classics. These books are popular
with children and often exhibit the same biases found in readers and other types of literature already discussed. Women are seldom main characters in these stories. They more commonly appear as mothers, teachers, or adult foils (Rudman, 1976). When they are main characters, they are often laughable (Peggy Parish's *Amelia Bedelia* and Ellen MacGregor's *Miss Pickerell*). When the women are powerful, such as in *Mary Poppins*, they are fantastical, unmarried and childless. Protagonists are never mothers (Rudman, 1976). When women are presented in a more contemporary role, often the view is not flattering. The working mother is often a target. In Kerr's *Dinky Hocker Shoots Smack* and Perl's *That Crazy April*, the children resent and suffer from a lack of attention from their working mothers. There are, however, balancing books which present the working mother in a positive light. Such books as Elizabeth Starr Hill's *Evan's Corner*, Florence Adam's *Mushy Eggs*, and Norma Klein's *Mom, the Wolfman and Me* portray the working woman sympathetically and the children are not perceived as suffering because of the mother's job (Rudman, 1976). These books are not common, but are becoming more so as time progresses.

Some recent additions to children's fiction have included stories in which girls are main characters. They are not in the majority, but with searching, do exist. One of the most famous examples is Scott O'Dell's *Island of the Blue Dolphins*. This book is unique because when it was first written it was rejected because it was a story of survival with a female protagonist (a contradiction in terms, right?) and the publishers felt that, first, no boy would read a story about a girl, and second, a girl couldn't have survived the ordeal anyway. For the sake
of popularity and realism they wanted the heroine to be turned into a hero (Nilsen, 1971). Ultimately, the main character wasn't changed and today the story is popular with both boys and girls. Other good examples of books with female main characters are *Julie of the Wolves* (another story of survival written by George), *The Ostrich Chase* (Howard), and *The Reed Tale* (Loft). These heroines are dynamic and assertive. The plots are well written and interesting. Books such as Fizhugh's *Harriet the Spy* and Linge.r's *Pippi Longstocking* also present independent heroines. The books are good, but it is possible to criticize them on the grounds that their heroines are viewed as exceptions - lonely and set apart from others by their differences (Rudman, 1976). Books such as Bette Greene's *Phillip Hall Likes Ye; I Reckon Maybe* and Vera and Bill Cleaver's *Ellen Grae* present realistic and independent children. The trend these books are setting indicates a possible reform in children's literature that may lead to a more androgenous view of the sexes.

This trend is not all inclusive however. Traditional books, especially those for adolescent girls, are still caught in the tea cake and petticoat syndrome. Stereotypic ideals are expressed and females perform as expected by a stricter and more traditional society than is common today. The books have traditional plots, featuring dates, pretty dresses and going on trips. Included in this category are the camp stories, nurse stories, detective stories, stewardess stories and light romances so dearly loved by junior high and high school girls. Characters such as Sue Barton, Cherry Ames, Nancy Drew, and the starry-eyed Harlequin romance heroines teach young girls all they
need to know about social graces and dating skills. (So what if they're totally wrong and unrealistic? The girls don't know any better...) They have some value, teaching a modicum of independence and initiative, but they also contradict themselves. They say a girl can be dainty and helpless and at the same time gun around in her own roadster, catching crooks and saving shock victims. Maybe this combination is possible, but to combine such extremes would seem to be difficult.

Bobbi Ann Yason (1975) expresses this opinion when she writes about Nancy Drew,

Nancy manages the almost impossible feat of being wholesomely "feminine" - glamorous, stylish, tactful - while also proving herself strong, resourceful, bold, the most independent of the girls sleuths. Nancy is a paradox...

The Nancy Drew series has an added illustrative bonus - Nancy's two friends, Bess Marvin and George Fayne, emphasize the ambivalence centered in Nancy. Bess is dainty, feminine, passive, gullible and lapses into mindless oblivion at the sight of hot fudge. George "an attractive girl with a boy's name" (the standard line from just about any opening chapter of any Nancy Drew book) is boyish, wears her hair short and says "Hypers" a lot. "They are recognizable only by their loyalty and as mirrors of Nancy's two halves - tomboy and fluffhead. The two roles are clumsy, short sighted examples of the females we are taught to loath." (Yason, 1975). Bess and George are no more real than Nancy. They are stereotypic personifications of the options open to women. Nancy Drew incorporates the two and becomes the impossible ideal. She departs from the norm without losing any of advantages. Nancy represents the archetype of the "liberated" woman (Weible, 1977) without losing any of
the advantages of the traditionally feminine role.

Characters such as Cherry Ames, Vicki Barr and Trixie Beldon are all variations on the same Nancy Drew theme. Some are waifish, some professional and some glamorous, but they all reflect the same characteristics, usually to a lesser degree, of Nancy and her gang. They are, or at one time have been, very popular. Today Nancy Drew has surpassed them and is currently in a productive period with many new stories being added annually. Old stories are being revised to update and modernize the girl sleuth's image. Her popularity today corresponds with her popularity in 1929, when she solved her first mystery, making her and her series classics, known to most female readers at some time in their lives.

Considering all material available, children's fiction provides a wide range of models to choose from. Traditional, sex stereotyped models are most frequent, but with some investigation, less rigid images of women are available. Women receive many treatments in this area, and which ones are incorporated are a matter of choice.

CLASSICS

Classics are books that have withstood the test of time and remain popular over a long period. They have a certain literary quality and universal sense of appeal (Rudman, 1976). Often they are products or reflections of their times, but manage to supersede the temporal into timelessness (Rudman, 1976). There are few girls' stories that present women in positive roles in this genre. Often the role of the heroine is a tragic one (Lieberman, 1972). Examples are Tess Durbeyville, Anna Karenina, Desdemona, Ophelia, Lady MacBeth and Little Nell. According
to Marcia Lieberman (1972),

Some of these women are virtuous, others are not, but all are tormented and nearly all are either murdered or commit suicide...Death or suicide is often more pathetic but less noble than the man's, with women frequently dying without having obtained illumination.

This view is true as far as it goes. However, it only applies to the tragic and moralistic types of literature. Not all classic females died. Few were effective and powerful, many were neurotic, but a good share lived. Some classics present women in positive, though stereotypic, roles. Little Women fits in this category, as do the lighter works of the Wizard of Oz and Mary Poppins. These pieces of work may not be of the highest literary quality, but they fulfill the other requirements necessary to be considered classics.

There are some classic children's and adolescent's books that portray women in a relatively positive, non-biased way. One such book is Francis Hodgson Burnett's The Secret Garden. She presents a heroine who is bold, assertive and independent (Mary), a boy who is nurturing (Dickon), and another boy who is weak, spoiled and dependent (Colin). These children reverse typical roles and possess realistic characteristics. The story is entertaining and well written. Probably the most famous "girl's" classic is Little Women (1868) by Louisa May Alcott. People are individuals, and Jo, as already mentioned, is an upstanding heroine. Other selections include Caddie Woodlawn by Brink, The Courage of Sarah Noble by Dagliesh and The Little House series by Wilder. These books are well written and present females in a positive light, but they also reaffirm the position of male authority, superiority and wisdom (Rudman, 1976). While they do portray the male in a superior role, it can be
argued that this is a realistic representation of the era in which these books were written. The attitude may be factual rather than a sexual bias of either the author or publisher.

NONFICTION BOOKS

Many nonfiction books have been written to teach children about sex roles. Some are good. Some are bad. One of the most famous bad examples is a book by Whitney Darrow, Jr. entitled *I'm Glad I'm a Boy! I'm Glad I'm a Girl*, which was published in 1970. Typical lines from the book are: "Boys are strong. Girls are graceful" and "Boys fix things. Girls need things fixed." Fortunately, better books for children exist. Books such as Eve Merriam's *Boys and Girls, Girls and Boys* emphasize mutual respect, cooperation and equality. Harlow Rockwell's *My Doctor* teaches children not to be afraid of their doctors. An added bonus is that the doctor pictured is a woman. The *What Can She Be?* series by Gloria and Esther Goldreich shows females potential professional roles. Additional books are *Girls are Equal Too* (Bdale Carlson), *Feminism in America* (Elaine Landau), *A Single Standard* (Jane Harris) and *A Pictorial History of Women in America* (Ruth Warren). These books give an overview of women's past and the effect it has on their present and future.

The most general conclusion that can be drawn from all of this is that the literature presents a mixed picture. Sometimes women are submissive, sometimes aggressively equal and sometimes just regular people. Most of the books that stereotype women as passive are the older ones. Traditional stories tend to have more of a sexist bias than do more recent stories. This may indicate a gradual change in societal view, with a
broadening of respect and appreciation for the female segment of the population.

III. CURRENT PUBLISHING GUIDELINES

Publishing companies are playing a major role in change toward nonsexist literature. Whether they are acting as instigators or as reflective followers is hard to determine, but these companies are evincing a changed attitude and are taking corrective action regarding the issue of sexism in children's literature. They are setting up guidelines for equal treatment of the sexes in their publications and are applying them to both textual and illustrative materials.

The following is a partial list compiled from various guidelines and suggested criteria - specifically from the McGraw-Hill Book Co. and Scott, Foresman and Co. This partial listing presents the common suggestions from both and gives a general overview of the total contents of the lists. The suggestions are felt to help improve literature, from a nonsexist point of view, and will aid in portraying women in more positive and realistic light.

* Characters should be individuals and behave consistently with their personalities rather than their sexes.

* Sensitivity should be displayed towards females as a group as would be displayed towards an ethnic group.

* Occupations should be gender free.

* Parents should be shown both in parental roles and occupational settings.

* Attributes such as mechanical competence and grace should not be restricted by sex.

* Competition between males and females should be discouraged; cooperation should be encouraged.

* Women should not always be weaker, shorter and more delicate.
*Both males and females should be independent and dependent in context.

*Actions and achievements of women should be recognized.

*Contributions of women to politics, the sciences and other fields often considered to be exclusively masculine should be presented and explored.

*Editors should actively search for materials written by women.

*Females should be included as often as males in math problems, spelling and vocabulary sentences, discussion questions, test items and other exercises.

*Writings of women should be represented in quotations and references whenever possible.

*The shared humanity and common attributes of men and women should be stressed— not their gender differences. Neither sex should be stereotyped.

*Women should not be typecast into traditional occupations. An attempt should be made to break job stereotypes for both women and men.

*Women within a profession should be shown at all professional levels, including the top levels. Women should be portrayed in positions of authority over men and other women.

*Books should be designed to show married women who work outside the home and should treat them favorably.

*Instructional materials should never imply that all women have a "mother instinct" or that the emotional life of a family suffers because a woman works.

*Girls should be shown as having and exercising the same options as boys in their play and career choices.

*Like men and boys, women and girls should be portrayed as independent, active, courageous, competent, decisive, persistent, serious-minded and successful.

*Sometimes men should be shown as quiet and passive, or fearful and indecisive, or illogical and immature.

*Both sexes should be dealt with in the same terms. References to a man's or woman's appearance, charm, or intuition should be avoided.

*In descriptions of women, a patronizing or girl-watching tone should be avoided, as should sexual innuendoes, jokes and puns. Examples of stereotypes to be avoid: scatter-brained female, fragile flower, catty gossip, henpecking
*Women should be spoken of as participants in the action, not as possessions of the men.

*Women should not be portrayed as needing male permission for their actions.

*Avoid the use of "he" to signify a hypothetical person or humanity in general. Alternatives:
- reword to eliminate unnecessary gender pronouns
- recast into plural
- replace the masculine pronoun with one, you, he or she, or her or his
- alternate male and female expressions and examples
- use "he" but include a statement to the effect that the masculine pronouns are being used for succinctness and are intended to refer to both females and males.

*Occupational terms ending in man should be replaced whenever possible.

- fireman — firefighter
- foreman — supervisor
- salesman — salesclerk

*Language that assumes all readers are male should be avoided.

*Parallel language should be used for men and women (e.g. men and women, not men and ladies).

*Unnecessary reference to or emphasis on a woman's married status should be avoided.

*Whenever possible, a term should be used that includes both sexes (no college boys and co-eds, instead students).

*Males should not always be first in order of mention.

*A patronizing tone toward women, created by euphemism, diminutive suffixes and lack of parallelism must be avoided.


These are all publishers' suggestions to improve the quality of children's literature and present the image of the female more favorably. This will be achieved through equalizing both the presence and quality of feminine characters with males, and by attempting to treat both fairly and nonpartisanly.
One question which remains is whether these guidelines would actually lead to less stereotyping in children's literature. Would some of the artistry be lost by following a set outline of criteria? Would the quality of the literature decline? Perhaps one gives up some of the art in order to achieve nonsexism.

IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The basic premise of this paper has been that children learn sex role stereotypes from early and prolonged exposure to children's literature. The stereotypes are, at best, an inaccurate portrayal of today's world, and at worst, are a limiting and destructive influence on growing children.

Children's literature can be viewed as a tool of society, used in the socialization process of the child, instilling cultural norms in the child as he or she matures. Traditionally, this appears to have been a positive function. But since feminist critics looked in, things have become confusing.

Well loved and traditional stories have been axed as being sexist and having no value. The general impression one gets is that one should burn these books and replace them with thoroughly modern books with androgynous characters — boys learning to cook and girls dreaming of becoming doctors; working mothers and occasional house-husbands. The idea behind this movement is a good one. Some stories are needlessly sexist and other, less biased views might be helpful in balancing them out. Some of these books might be so demeaning to women that perhaps they should be discouraged. But these things should be taken in perspective. A one-sided feminist view is just as
narrow as a one-sided sexist view. Some stories are not supportive of women as equals. But then, society has often not been supportive either. Traditionally, women have been oppressed. Perhaps some of these stories have the redeeming virtue of truth to them - they may give a portrayal that is denigrating, but factual.

This does not mean that writing styles should not change. Just because women once had to passively wait does not mean that it will always be that way. Times are changing, but the change is taking place gradually, not instantaneously. Today's collection of literature reflects this change. It is eclectic, with conflicting models of behavior for girls and boys. Some stories emphasize traditional values, others try to convince the female reader that she can be and do anything. This may be confusing to today's child; I know it is to me. It must be difficult trying to sort out what is actually true from the jumble of contradictory information. I have no answers. I started out believing that the sexism evinced in literature was reprehensible, and that extraordinary amounts of revision and new writing were necessary. I still believe this to a certain degree, but I also realize that presenting a child with a totally independent, actualized female protagonist is no more realistic than modeling a passive, vacant-eyed angel. Neither view is realistic. The feminine sex role is in a state of flux now and the ambivalence in children's literature reflects this. A child must be able to pick and choose among the characters, building a multi-dimensional female character that combines the best of the possible choices. Then with this basis,
maybe a more flexible, realistic female figure will emerge.
It would be nice. Maybe Nancy Drew was right all along -
maybe it is possible to have the best of both worlds - at a
price - but at a reasonable price.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


(Cont.)


