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Gender Stereotypes in Children's Books: their prevalence and influence on cognitive and affective development

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ABSTRACT *In the 1960s and 1970s many researchers in the USA noted the prevalence of gender stereotypes in books for children. Numerous studies showed that females were typically portrayed as passive, dependent and generally incapable, and that males were typically portrayed as active, independent and generally competent. Stereotype patterns were consistent across a variety of reading materials, including picture-books, fiction for older readers and school-books. Some researchers questioned what the potential effects of such stereotypes might be on readers, but few examined these questions empirically. A review of this literature led us to question whether increased awareness about the potentially harmful effects of gender stereotypes had led to their elimination from books intended for young readers. This paper describes the data we collected on a set of picture-books. We found that while the prevalence of stereotypes has decreased somewhat, the decreases in quantity and in kind have not been statistically meaningful. A discussion of the effects of gender stereotypes on affective development and on cognitive development is also presented.*

Introduction

In the 1960s a number of researchers in the US began to notice the prevalence of gender (and other) stereotypes in children's books, as well as in other media. Researchers also began to question what effects such stereotypes might have on children's development.

Numerous studies were conducted, most of which revealed fairly similar patterns. Males always outnumbered females by a significant proportion, regardless of whether the characters depicted were humans, animals, machines, or fantasy characters. In addition, males were most likely to be portrayed as positive, active and competent, while females were likely to be portrayed as negative, passive and incompetent. For example, in *The Fool of the World* (Ronsome, 1968,

cited in Weitzman *et al.*, 1972, p. 1133) "the princess remains peering out the window of her castle, watching all the activities on her behalf. While boys play in the real world outdoors, girls sit and watch them—cut off from that world by the window, porch, or fence around their homes".

It seemed obvious that repeated exposure to these kinds of images was likely to have detrimental effects on the development of children's self-esteem, particularly on that of girls, and on the perceptions children have of their own, and of others' abilities and possibilities. Advocates for children (primarily educators), aware of the obvious potential for harm, invoked authors' and publishers' assistance in eliminating such stereotypes from children's books. Some publishers (e.g. McGraw-Hill) responded by developing guidelines for eliminating sexist bias in their children's books. They also sought to enlist parents' and other educators' aid in preventing the use of biased materials, with the goal of facilitating healthier development for both girls and boys.

As we reviewed this literature, we noticed several things which interested us particularly. First, this type of research comes to an end in the latter part of the 1970s. Second, most of the research focused on books for older children, and very little seemed to have addressed whether such stereotyping occurred in picture-books for younger children. The data which did exist, including a survey of Caldecott winners (Weitzman *et al.*, 1972), was very disturbing, and indicated not only a prevalence of sex-role stereotypes (with a particular emphasis on those which devalued females), but an increasing incidence and complexity of stereotypes in children's books as one progressed up through intended age of reader. Third, while much of the research suggested that these stereotypes might have detrimental effects on the development of self-concept, it also seemed likely that they might affect other, more cognitive developmental domains as well, an issue which seemed to have been little considered by early researchers. This paper will address each of these issues.

Have Things Changed?

First, the fact that the call for reform virtually ceases at the end of the last decade led us to wonder whether that meant that the problem had been solved. It seemed reasonable to believe that researchers might no longer be concerned with the problems of stereotyping because it was no longer occurring. However, our own experiences in buying books for children led us to question that conclusion. We had both experienced considerable frustration when trying to find books for pre-schoolers which were not heavily imbued with a multitude of stereotypes. However, rather than rely on our own intuitions, we decided to test the question empirically—had gender stereotypes more-or-less disappeared from picture books, or were they still a problem?

We selected a random sample of approximately half the picture-books (a total of 136 books) listed in the booklist in *The Horn Book* for the years 1967, 1977 and 1987. *The Horn Book* was selected because it is one of the primary resources used by pre-school teachers and librarians in the United States for making selections for book purchases in pre-schools and kindergartens. Sampled years included three one-year periods approximately ten years apart, which reflected current practices (1987), those prevalent at the point when the research literature was

beginning to burgeon (1967) and those occurring at a mid-point between the early and current periods (1977).

We coded the books' content on the basis of five characteristics—gender of the author, gender of the main character, number and gender of other “subsidiary” characters, type of main character (whether it was a person, an animal or an “other”) and genre of the book (e.g. whether it was a folk-tale, family story, etc.). These characteristics were selected on the basis of research conducted in the 1960s, to insure that the same issues were addressed presently which had been originally raised as important in this domain.

Table I shows some of the data from one of the earliest and perhaps most frequently-cited studies of gender images in children's books. Table II shows a portion of the data we obtained. The early data are not strictly comparable to ours, both because those data reflect gender images taken primarily from books for older children, rather than from picture-books (the source of our data) and because we organized our coding categories somewhat differently.

TABLE I. Sexism in children's readers, 1972 and 1975 (data from *Dick and Jane as Victims* by Women on Words and Images, 1972, 1975)

Content	1972	1975
Boy-centered stories to girl-centered stories	5:2	7:2
Male biographies to female biographies	6:1	2:1
Male occupations to female occupations	6:1	3:1
Adult male main characters to adult female main characters	3:1	*
Male animal stories to female animal stories	2:1	*
Male folk or fantasy stories to female folk or fantasy stories	4:1	*

*Not calculated in 1975 update

Our data indicate that while in the past two decades males outnumbered females significantly, and still do in subsidiary roles, the approximate numbers of male and female main characters are nearing equality. This alone is encouraging since more salient characters are more likely to influence the reader. More importantly, the discrepancy between the types of situations in which characters are portrayed is diminishing as well. Girls are just as likely to have adventures as they are to be shown in a domestic setting—a major change from 20 years ago. Interestingly, in the 1987 sample, girls were slightly more likely than boys to appear as the main character in folk, fantasy and adventure stories, and boys and girls are equally likely to appear as the main character in socially-oriented or family stories. These data suggest a major shift from the trends of 20 years ago.

It is important to point out that statistically these trends were both non-significant. Although the numbers certainly suggest a shift in representation, the apparent shift could simply be due to chance, and a larger or different sample might or might not reveal a statistically significant difference as a function of time. Perhaps the most serious sampling concern regards our coding of only *Horn Book* selections, rather than a random sample of all books published during each

TABLE II. Gender representation in children's picture books (Peterson & Lach, 1988)

Content	1967	1977	1987
Male person stories to female person stories	2:1	3:1	1:1
Male main characters to female main characters	2:1	3:1	1:1
Male subsidiary characters to female subsidiary characters	1.5:1	2:1	1.5:1
Male animal stories to female animal stories	2:1	3:1	1.5:1
Male folk or fantasy stories to female folk or fantasy stories	1.5:1	3:1	1.1:5
Male social or family stories to female social or family stories	3:1	7:1	1:1

time-frame. It is quite possible that *Horn Book* selectors are sensitive to issues like stereotyping, and thus exclude books with such features [1]. If so, then a selection from a more general group of books might indicate quite different trends.

Further, the observed shift in character representation, even if true in general, does not mean that all problems in this area have been solved. Many, if not all of us, work in systems in which books published some time in the past are used regularly. In addition, it is unlikely that all new books being published will be free of gender stereotypes, even though that seems true of more of them than was true in the past. Thus, we must continue to be concerned with the possible effects of exposure to such stereotypes on children's development. It is to those effects we now turn.

Effects of Picture Books on Gender Development

Gender development is a critical part of the earliest and most important learning experiences of the young child. Parents, care-givers and teachers formulate the social structures that initiate the young into their gender-specific roles. By the time girls and boys enter kindergarten, they exhibit gender role preferences, such as choosing "girls' clothes" or "boys' clothes," and preferring "boys' toys" or "girls' toys", as a function of their own gender (Brown, 1956). Hartley's early work (1959) on play, indicated that by the time children were four they realized that the primary feminine role is housekeeping, while the primary masculine role is wage-earning. An observer only needs to visit any childcare center or nursery to recognize that Hartley's findings are still accurate today.

Major influences on gender role development and socialization of young children occur through picture-books. Illustrated books play a significant and pervasive part in early gender development because books are the primary vehicle for the presentation of societal values to the young child (Arbuthnot, 1964). Throughout the history of children's books, authors have told their stories not only to entertain but to articulate the prevailing cultural values and social standards. Children's books are especially useful indicators of societal norms. And, children's books have, for a very long time, defined society's prevailing standards of masculine and feminine role development. Literature for young children—picture-books, folk-tales, fables, fantasy, poetry and realism—is close

to the heart of the young and growing child. The language and illustrations of all children's books, good, bad, or indifferent, shape their lives.

Picture-books offer young children a macrocosmic resource through which they can discover worlds beyond their own life-space. The young child's sense of personal and gender significance is changed, influenced and connected to the world community through books written for them by adults.

Story-books help young children learn about what other boys and girls do and say and feel. Picture-books provide the young child with a broader social insight, often different from his or her home and school experiences. Readers learn from a good story what is expected of children and come to realize the accepted standards of right and wrong within the complexity of their gender. Children's books explicitly reflect the particular culture's values and are a vital force for persuading children to accept those values. In addition, picture-books provide children with role models and clear images that prescribe for the children what they can and should be like when they grow up (Weitzman *et al.*, 1972).

Prior to the eighteenth century, messages about expected behaviour were much the same for girls and boys. All children were admonished and expected to love their parents and to live a pious, obedient and industrious life. In the 1740s children's books as a genre came of age in England, and eminent publishers like John Newbery began the practice of publishing books which appeared to be specifically intended for male or female audiences (Segel, 1986). However, close examination of the texts reveals that the messages regarding expected conduct were identical for readers of both sexes.

The only exceptions to this practice were in some early school stories, and in some biographies for older children. Because boarding schools were sex-segregated, school-centered stories extolled appropriate behaviors which were also sex-segregated. The underlying rationale for sex-differentiated biographies was the assumption that "the child reader's emulations of the lives of the great would be more likely if girls read about famous women, boys about famous men" (Segel, 1986, p. 167). That few women were famous in contexts other than their roles as spouses or progenitors of famous men was not seen as problematic.

It was not until the turn of the century, or thereafter, that publishers began to produce a wider variety of popular books specifically targeted toward female or male readers. And it was not until the last quarter of the nineteenth century that widely diverse types of "boys' books" and "girls' books" became commonplace.

The messages contained in these gender-targeted books were clear. Books for boys emphasized action, accomplishment and self-direction; boys' future sphere of influence was to be in the wider world, where they would assume the reins of leadership. Girls, on the other hand, were expected to assume the bridle of subservience; their books emphasized self-abnegation, obedience, humility and servitude. Edward G. Salmon's famous essay, published in 1886, summarizes this view:

Boys' literature of a sound kind ought to help build up men. Girls' literature ought to help build up women. If in choosing the books that boys shall read it is necessary to remember that we are choosing mental food for the future chiefs of a great race, it is equally important not to forget in choosing books for girls that we are choosing mental food for the future mothers and wives of that race. When Mr. Ruskin says that man's work is public and woman's private, he seems for the moment

insensible to the influence on their husbands, brothers, and fathers. Woman's work in the ordering, beautifying, and elevating of the commonweal is hardly second to man's; and it is this which ought to be borne in mind in rearing girls. (cited in Segel, 1986, p. 171).

Thus, books intended for consumption by girls contained very different messages about appropriate behavior and about life possibilities than those intended for consumption by boys. Specifically, boys have been encouraged to view a wide range of life possibilities for themselves, while girls have been directed toward a much narrower range of possibilities—until quite recently, almost entirely those centered in a domestic context.

Has the situation changed markedly in recent years? As we argue elsewhere in this paper, it has not changed substantially in the United States (although there is a statistically non-significant trend in the direction of change). Nor does it appear to have changed substantially in Great Britain [2].

The late 1960s and early 1970s saw in Great Britain, as in the US, a rising concern regarding the many types of prejudice found in children's books. Groups like Teachers Against Racism, the National Association for Multiracial Education, the Children's Rights Workshop (Book Project), and the London Education Collective's Kids' Books Group, were all organized to address and redress problems of race and sex stereotypes in children's books (Zimet, 1976). These groups represented an important "milestone . . . in breaking away from a pattern long established and sanctioned by the (publishing and educational) establishment" (Zimet 1976, p. 62).

Sadly, it appears that the effects of these and other groups (like their counterparts in the US) have not yet been completely successful in eliminating stereotypes from children's books. In a recent paper, Richardson (1986, p. 32) states that "many schoolbooks (in Great Britain) present conforming or reforming messages, not transforming ones". By this he means that these school-books present inaccurate and stereotyped messages about social roles and about behavior. Further, such books often emphasize either directly or indirectly the importance of maintaining traditional roles and behavior patterns, rather than questioning or facilitating change of those traditional views.

He also notes that while in the last two decades there has been an increasing interest in school-book biases in the US and in continental Europe, there has been considerably less interest in these issues in Great Britain. Further, in spite of several analyses of children's books with respect to sexism (e.g. Cannan, 1972; Lobban, 1974; Moon, 1974; all cited in Zimet, 1976), "there has been little or no significant change so far in the quality of books being produced by commercial publishers" (Richardson, 1986, p. 33). It appears, then, that while there is some growing recognition of gender biases in children's books, very little constructive response or change has occurred.

In the US, the Child Study Association (1969), aware of the potential effects of picture-books on gender development and socialization, states that a book's emotional and intellectual impact on a young reader are important considerations in selecting books. It recommends that children's books present positive ethical values. In a more recent statement (Child Study Children's Book Committee, 1980), it notes that one important consideration is the possible influence of picture-books on young readers or listeners who are young citizens in a democratic society. To the degree that democratic ideals are valued, authors and illustra-

tors should demonstrate an appropriate and respectful treatment of characters of all ages, of both genders, and of all racial and ethnic backgrounds.

The Council on Interracial Books for Children (1976) echoes this concern. It notes that the values which children develop arise from the larger society, and are reflected in children's books, which "play an active part in maintaining that (existing social) structure by molding future adults who will accept it" (p. 1). It contends that while in an ideal democratic society books would reflect the interests of all who make up the society, in fact this is not the case. Specifically, "examination of thousands of children's books published in the United States over the years does not bear up this belief. The value-system that dominates them is very white, very contemptuous of females except in traditional roles, and very oriented to the needs of the upper classes" (p. 2). It also notes that such value-systems are not fixed, but can and do change as society changes, and that recent years in the United States have seen "strong pressures on the society to change, to become less oppressive for large groups of people. These pressures have, in turn, brought major upheavals in concepts about social relations" (p. 3), including those related to race and to sex. It concludes that

In an age of great and necessary upheaval, new educational materials—including children's books—must be developed. Failure to do so would be a betrayal of our children, for it would leave them stranded and lost in a changing world, unprepared to relate to (the) process of change. We propose that children's literature become a tool for the conscious promotion of human values that will help lead to greater human liberation. We are advocates of a society which will be free of racism, sexism, ageism, classism, materialism, elitism, and other negative values. We are advocates of a society in which all human beings have the true, not rhetorical, opportunity to realize their full human potential. We therefore frankly advocate books that will help achieve such a society and help prepare children for such a society. (Council on Interracial Books for Children, 1976, p. 4)

Historically, books were by design shapers and influencers of the young. Today, they exert ever-increasing influence and power on gender development, since more and more children are moving into day-care, pre-school and nursery settings. It is important to note that by the end of this century, it is expected that 80% of all children in the US younger than six will be in some kind of pre-school setting (Day, 1988). A similar trend in early education is being observed in Western Europe and Canada. In these pre-school settings, picture-books play a major role in the curriculum and daily activities of the children [3]. These books, like blocks, clay and paint are the essential and constant ingredients found in every school and home setting.

Part of the data we have collected (Wegge *et al.*, 1986) indicates that parents, child-care staff, and other teachers of young children spend a significant amount of time reading to the children in their care. In a state-wide survey, 491 subjects were selected using a Random Digit-Dial sample, stratified by telephone area code and prefix. When a household was reached, the selection of the adult respondent to be interviewed was based on the "next birthday" method (i.e. the adult in the household whose birth date was most proximate in time was asked to respond to the interview questions). Of the subjects contacted, 124 had children under the

age of 7 living in the home, and responded to our questions regarding reading practices and selection of reading materials for children. The parents interviewed represented a wide range of ages, educational backgrounds, occupations and socio-economic status [4].

The parents who responded to our questions buy many books for their children. Eighty percent in fact buy or borrow at least ten books per month for their children. They also devote regular time to read to their children; 50% read to their children more than two hours per week, and another 36% read to their children at least one to two hours per week. In addition, children spend a considerable amount of time interacting with books by themselves, or reading with siblings or playmates; 60% spend more than two hours per week using books this way, and another 18% spend at least one to two hours per week in these activities.

Parents' book selections are influenced by several factors. The strongest influence on their selections was their own previous response to a book; 29% indicated that "personal favorites" were most likely to be chosen as books to share with their children. Other important influences were friends' and relatives' suggestions (18%) and teachers' recommendations (14%).

However, the parents acknowledged that they seldom screened the books on the basis of stereotypes. When asked to indicate how important each of several factors were in their decisions about book acquisitions, 87% indicated that a "match to the child's interest" was very important, 73% "quality of illustrations", and 57% "creative language use"; only 42% indicated that "stereotypes" were very important in evaluating books. When asked which of several types of stereotypes were of greatest concern when making book choices, 40% indicated that racial stereotypes were of greatest concern while 23% focussed upon stereotypes about disabilities, and only 11% upon gender stereotypes.

Interestingly, although few parents indicated a serious worry about gender stereotypes, there were some interesting relationships (although none were statistically significant) between this statement and certain demographic variables. When subjects were categorized according to age, 69% of the parents between 25 and 34 years old voiced such a concern, with 23% of the older (35-49 years) and only 8% of the younger (18-24 years) parents agreeing. Level of education was also linked to worries about gender stereotypes, with 24% of those who had completed a college degree expressing such views, compared with 36% of those who had completed some college work, 35% of those who had completed a high school diploma and 5% of those with some high school courses completed. When average income was considered, those in the middle-income group were much more likely to indicate these concerns (59%) than those in the low-income group (29%) or in the high-income group (12%). Finally, female respondents were almost twice as likely (62%) to voice such views as were male respondents (38%). This general lack of attention to gender issues in selecting books for children was disturbing, given the significant impact such books may have on children's lives.

The very young are assisted by picture-books to see beneath the surface of everyday truths about themselves and their world (Kiefer, 1985). By giving children appropriate picture-books and encouraging them to think about their responses to the books, teachers and parents of young children help them sort out their feelings, ideas, attitudes and values. Educators, through the responsible

and sensitive use of books, can help children fashion their lives by focusing on appropriate stories and models of gender development.

People who provide books for children may fail to recognize the power that children's books have to sustain and transform the culture of a family, a nation, and of a world (Lystad, 1980). We have an obligation and the power, through the educational process, to employ children's literature in a way that demonstrates to every child the world of our dreams and visions, a world which challenges all children and maximizes their potential to grow up fully human and fully alive.

Effects of Stereotypes on Cognition

While attitudes and ideas about self and others are clearly related to cognition, there is another set of cognitive issues specifically related to the reading process. The theoretical view of what reading is has changed substantially in the last few years. It used to be thought of as a relatively straightforward process through which the reader extracted meaning from the text (even when the "text" consisted primarily of a set of meaningfully-linked illustrations).

Today, there is growing recognition that what readers bring to the text influences how they take meaning from it. Different readers, with different backgrounds, may take very different meanings from the same text. In short, we now know that reading is a constructive process (Crawford & Chaffin, 1986).

One popular model for understanding such constructive processes is that of schema theory (cf. Neisser, 1976). Quite simply, schemas (or, more properly, schemes or schemata) are organizational frameworks for knowledge. Those schemas not only change and develop as a function of what the person experiences, but they also directly affect the way in which the person comprehends the world.

Crawford & Chaffin (1986), among others, emphasize the importance of gender schemas in reading comprehension. Just as children's understanding of the fairy-tale *Snow White* is influenced by their schemas for other concepts, it is also influenced by their understanding of femaleness and maleness. For example, the child's schema for "make-believe" affects the child's understanding and interpretation of several events in the story, such as the fact that the evil witch is only pretend, as are the seven dwarves who live in a humble cottage in the forest, while spending their days mining rich jewels. Children's schema for gender also affects the interpretation; for example, if they have accepted the stereotype that it is a female's job to do domestic chores, they are unlikely to question why Snow White so willingly agrees to become the house-maid for seven strange men. On the other hand, the child who has not incorporated that stereotype into his or her gender schema might well question (as did one young friend), "Why didn't they just pick up after themselves? If I was her, I would only have cleaned up my own things—or maybe had people take turns picking up and cooking."

A number of studies have demonstrated (although almost entirely with older children or with adults) that gender schemas influence a variety of cognitive processes, including comprehension, recall of material, clustering of learned concepts, and implications and inferences drawn from the material (cf. Martin & Halverson, 1983; Signorella & Liben, 1984). Gender stereotypes affect readers' perceptions of others' behavior, their memory for that behavior and the inferences they draw from it (cf. Bem, 1981; Berndt & Heller, 1986). It is clear that

gender stereotypes affect not only self-concept, potential for achievement and perceptions of others, but a variety of dimensions of cognitive performance as well.

Just as other schemas can be modified with experience, so can gender schemas. Crawford & Chaffin (1986) note that such schemas are not fixed, but are "internalized social constructs" which are subject to change, based on experience.

Perhaps the ultimate question for educators is, is there any data which suggests the possibility of affecting such changes? Can an awareness of stereotypes in children's books, and an attempt to eliminate them from children's environments, make a difference? Can materials which are chosen specifically because they deal with these issues actually affect children's development?

Frost (1979, cited in Campbell & Wirtenberg, 1980) found that elementary school children who read stories about people who had successfully fought sex discrimination demonstrated less stereotyped attitudes about the jobs and activities mentioned in the stories. In a second study in which children engaged in five 30-minute reading sessions with non-stereotyped books, children's attitudes toward both peer and adult activities and personality characteristics showed decreases in gender stereotyping.

These findings are consistent with those of Barclay (1974) who found that children who were taught with non-sexist stories or books over sustained periods of time showed reduced sex-role stereotyping. For example, children in kindergartens who heard stories about mothers who worked outside the home increased the number and types of jobs they thought were appropriate for women to hold. These studies clearly show that sustained use of non-sexist materials produce significant changes in children's thinking. They develop more egalitarian attitudes about what females and males can do, and they show decreased sex-role stereotyping in general.

Campbell & Wirtenberg (1980) refer (although they do not always provide specific details) to other studies which have examined whether materials which eliminated sex-bias would affect children's attitudes and achievements in school. (For readers who are interested, they also describe similar studies which examined the effect of eliminating race-bias, and which found similar effects.) They note that the sheer amount of exposure children receive to sex-biased or to bias-free materials influences the impact those materials have. The longer children were exposed to materials containing sex-bias and stereotypes, the more sex-stereotyped their attitudes became, and the longer those attitudes were retained. Children who had used non-biased materials showed significantly less sex-stereotyping in their attitudes.

In addition to positively affecting attitudes, non-sexist materials also affect children's story preferences and their recall of story material. Jennings (1975) had children read stories describing male and female characters engaged in what were at that time traditional and non-traditional role behaviors (as letter carriers and as ballet dancers). Children showed strong preferences for stories in which characters conformed to gender-stereotyped roles. However, both girls and boys remembered more of the details of the same-sex, non-traditional story, and remembered the story for a longer period of time than the same-sex, stereotyped story.

Some studies have shown that themes included in stories used as stimulus materials sometimes carry over into the arena of actual behaviors, particularly in

the realm of task persistence and achievement-related behaviors. McArthur & Eisen (1976) read different types of achievement-related stories to pre-schoolers, then measured children's task persistence after hearing the stories. Stories depicted either achievement-oriented behavior by a male or by a female, or depicted no achievement-oriented behavior. Both girls and boys showed longer persistence at tasks after hearing the achievement-related story about the same-sex character than after hearing the story about the opposite-sex character. And, the more they remembered about the same-sex character story, the more task persistence they showed.

This research seems to show quite clearly that the reading materials to which we expose children shape their attitudes, their understanding and their behavior. While much of the research has been conducted with children who are in kindergarten or in the early grades, there is every reason to believe that children prior to that age are just as vulnerable—and perhaps more vulnerable—to the messages they receive from the picture-books they read, and have read to them.

Conclusions

One of the questions with which we began our research concerned whether, due to increasing social consciousness of the harmfulness of gender stereotypes, they had been eliminated from children's picture-books, and are no longer a concern for educators or for others who select reading materials for children. The answer seems to be that while some progress has been made in this direction, all of the problems have not yet been solved. Our analysis of *Horn Book* selections revealed that equity in terms of proportional representation of characters and of representational context (i.e. adventure vs domestic scenarios) has increased substantially in the last 20 years. However, the lack of statistical significance for these trends, combined with our own experiences and those shared by other colleagues, suggest very cautious optimism in concluding that gender stereotypes are being altogether eliminated from children's books, or that at some near point in time such stereotypes will become non-existent.

Many educators must use books containing sex-stereotypes which presently exist in their teaching environments. Further, it seems clear that stereotypes have not been expunged from all new books which are just coming on to the market, either for classroom use, or for purchase and reading by parents or others care-givers. Thus, it is essential that educators (both formal and informal) remain aware and carefully critical in evaluating books they plan to share with young children.

Those books can and do have profound effects on children's affective and cognitive development. They may impair the development of positive self-concepts, and induce negative attitudes toward the child's own developmental potential and toward that of other children. They may significantly alter the child's cognitive development, presenting them with an inaccurate and potentially destructive world-view.

Educators would seem to bear a special responsibility in facilitating further change. While awareness of the harm caused by stereotyped reading materials has risen among (at least some of) the scholarly community, and among some children's authors, it has apparently not risen among many of those who edit and publish children's books. Thus, it is important for educators to make it clear to

editors and publishers that such materials are no longer acceptable for use with children.

Further, the survey data we collected indicated that both parental age and parental education are linked to concerns (or lack of concern) about gender stereotypes. Young parents seem to be the least concerned about these issues, perhaps due to a mistaken belief that gender-based discrimination is a historical problem, and is no longer an issue in contemporary society. These young people represent a group whom we must educate about the significant negative effects stereotyped portrayals have on their children's lives. In addition, given the lower level of worries about stereotypes among parents with less extensive formal education, it appears that we must emphasize these issues early in the process of formal education. If we do so, people who choose not to pursue extensive formal education (or who are unable to do so) will take from their educational experiences an understanding that is as important to their future success, and that of their children, as developing sound reading and mathematics skills. Thus, educators at every level—from pre-school through to university—must increase their own, and others', awareness of and attention to these issues which so fundamentally affect human development.

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NOTES

- [1] Based on a recent telephone conversation (May 11, 1989) with one of the Associate Editors (K. Jameyson) of *The Horn Book*, this does not appear to be the case. When asked the general question, "Does gender play a part in the selection criteria for books reviewed by *The Horn Book*?" we were told that it does not. Rather, their selections are based purely on the criteria for good literature and on the quality of the illustrations.
- [2] Admittedly, our access to the scholarly literature in Great Britain (and in other countries) is somewhat limited. However, a search of the literature cited in *Psychological Abstracts* and in *ERIC* documents indicated virtually no research in this area, other than that described in the text of this paper.
- [3] To confirm this, we conducted an informal telephone survey (March 1988) of seven of the major local pre-schools, which included one franchise pre-school, two schools which are affiliated with local colleges, an industrial model daycare center for hospital personnel, and three other non-profit institutions. Respondents indicated that reading activities are scheduled, on average, for 25 minutes per day, with a range of scheduled reading periods from 10 minutes to 45 minutes per day.
- [4] Because of the demographics of our state, they did not represent a wide range of either racial or religious background. Over 97% of the sample was white, with 33% Protestants, 46% Catholics, and the remaining 21% of other faiths (or of no religious denomination). This somewhat non-representative nature of the sample should be taken into consideration when interpreting the findings.

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