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An Analysis of Gender Bias in Newbery Medal Award Winning Books from 1985 to 1995

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AN ANALYSIS OF GENDER BIAS
IN NEWBERY MEDAL AWARD WINNING BOOKS
FROM 1985 TO 1995

Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Committee of the
Department of Education and Human Development
State University of New York
College at Brockport
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Science in Education: Reading Teacher

by

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ABSTRACT

Intended for use by educators, librarians, and parents, this study analyzed Newbery Medal Award winners from 1985 to 1995 for gender bias. The items under analysis included the number of females or males represented in the titles, the gender of the authors, the number of females and males as main characters, and the role of the main character(s).

The results indicate a trend toward a less biased representation of females who engaged in counter-gender-type activities more often than males. Seven (64%) of the 11 books were written by female authors while 4 (36%) were written by male authors. Females were named in 1 (9%) title, males were named in 2 (18%) titles, and 8 (73%) titles were gender neutral. Of the 14 main characters portrayed, 6 (43%) were female while 8 (57%) were male. There were 4 (29%) active/nontraditional female main characters and 2 (14%) passive/traditional female main characters. All 8 (57%) male main characters were active/traditional.

A review of research of gender bias in children's literature, picture books, fairy tales, and language precedes the study.

CHAPTER I

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to analyze Newbery Medal Award winning books from 1985 to 1995 for gender bias.

Question to be Answered

Is gender bias present in Newbery Medal Award books from 1985 to 1995?

Need for the Study

Attitudes about oneself are formed at an early age according to many researchers such as Erikson (as cited in Kinman & Henderson, 1985) and Bandura and Thompson (as cited in Kashey, 1986).

Because teachers use books to teach almost every subject, books and teachers' attitudes about those books will have an influence on how children form both positive and negative attitudes about themselves. Teachers and students must become cognizant of the gender bias in children's literature, especially books that receive prestigious awards and are thus highly recommended. Teaching students to critically examine the books they read may influence attitudes about themselves and others.

Children frequently read books that have been recommended to them by people whose opinions they value, and people often recommend Newbery Medal Award books because those books were chosen as being excellent. Literature is one of the most effective methods of transmitting ideas and changing or perpetuating social

conventions. Literature alone cannot change gender-biased attitudes, nonetheless, literature can, and does, play a significant part. Shannon (1986) examined popular children's stories and made this quintessential observation:

The books children read and those read to them contribute to their intellectual, emotional, and social development...books provide examples that confirm and challenge the decisions of children's daily lives. *The effect of these books is rarely immediate; rather it is the result of repeated exposure over long periods of time* [italics added]. (p. 661)

The studies of gender bias in children's literature range over a period of many years, and this topic continues to be relevant in today's society. Current research is needed to determine if the Newbery Medal Award winning books treat both genders equally. Educators, parents, and other people who interact with children have an obligation to review materials in order to help them choose and recommend books to children that can help children to determine who they are, who they might become, and what they can do with their life choices. This study provides a means to facilitate and advance such reviews.

Definition of Terms

In this study the following terms are defined as follows:

Caldecott Medal -(named for Randolph Caldecott, an English illustrator) An award given by the Children's Services Division of the American Library Association to the illustrator of the most distinguished picture book of the year.

gender bias - prejudice or discrimination based solely on gender

gender-type behaviors - behaviors that have different consequences depending on the gender of the person exhibiting the behavior

invisibility - omission of certain groups in literature

Newbery Medal Award - (named for John Newbery, the first English publisher of books for children) An award given by the Children's Services Division of the American Library Association for the best book of the year for school age children.

sexism - prejudice or discrimination based solely on gender

sex-role stereotype - learned behaviors, attitudes and expectations, social conventions or norms that classify behaviors into narrow categories based solely on gender

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study were as follows:

The study attempted to control for the researcher's personal biases. Inasmuch as most research is somewhat subjective, data often can be analyzed in such a manner to support or refute specific findings. Other researchers reviewing the same materials and using the same methodology may arrive at similar or different conclusions.

Since the sample size is small (11 books), the results of the study may not be able to be generalized.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Purpose of the Study

This study analyzed Newbery Medal Award winning books from 1985 to 1995 for gender bias.

A review of related literature includes the following topics: gender bias in non-picture books, gender bias and children's gender attitudes, gender bias in picture books, and gender bias in related areas.

Many types of literature have been analyzed and discussed from various perspectives and in great depth. Children's literature is no exception, especially the Newbery and Caldecott Medal Award winners. These books have been carefully scrutinized by various researchers to determine if they are biased in some manner. Racism, sexism, and, more recently, ageism are subjects that have been examined. Today, the word "sexism" has been almost replaced with the words "gender bias" although both words refer to discrimination against one (usually the female) sex. In order to avoid changing the exact words of early researchers, the two terms are used interchangeably throughout this report.

Gender-bias in literature, and in education as a whole, is very insidious; many people are not even aware that it still exists. Frazier and Sadker (1973), the authors of Sexism in School and Society, documented the bias, sexism, and unfair teaching practices that female students experienced. Their textbook was the first written specifically for teachers that described gender bias.

Even though educators have been aware of the issue of sexism for over 20 years, Sadker and Sadker (1994) found that the problem had not improved all that much. "After almost two decades of research grants and thousands of hours of observation, we remain amazed at the stubborn persistence of these hidden sexist lessons [teachers interact more with males, ask them better questions, and give them more precise and helpful feedback]" (p. 1). In addition, because of gender bias, girls face "loss of self esteem, decline in achievement, and elimination of career options" (p. 1). The authors also ascertained that "*schoolbooks shape what the next generation knows and how it behaves*" [emphasis added] (p. 69). Lastly, Sadker and Sadker stated, "*While real-life role models influence children, so do characters in books....when they [children] read about females who accomplish outstanding deeds, both girls and boys believe that women are capable of great achievement*" [emphasis added] (pp. 259 & 266).

Gender Bias in Non-Picture Books

Researchers, in studies completed in the 1970s and 1980s (Ashby & Wittmaier, 1978; Donlin, 1972; Kinman & Henderson, 1985; Scott, 1986; Singh, 1973), frequently found examples of gender-bias in children's literature. Studies completed more recently in the 1990s (Goldberg, 1994; Goss, 1996; Wellhousen, 1996) discovered a change, albeit not a significant one, in the manner in which authors portray females and males.

"A Feminist Look at Children's Books" (as cited in Kinman & Henderson, 1985) was a study completed in 1971 where researchers examined Newbery Medal Award and Honor Books for gender-bias. The researchers evaluated a total of 49 pieces of literature and found that authors tended to write about males as main characters three times more often than they wrote about females as main characters.

Kinmann and Henderson (1985) updated the 1971 study, "A Feminist Look at Children's Books," by reviewing Newbery Medal Award winners and Newbery honor books for the years 1977 through

1984. The researchers analyzed content by using guidelines from four different sources. In general, they looked at setting, genre, and narrator's point-of-view. The data indicated that there was less gender bias in the books examined than there was in the books from the original study. Specifically, it was found that there "were eighteen female and twelve male main characters (compared with an earlier ratio of 1:3)...Eighteen books presented positive images of females, while only six presented negative images" (p. 887). Some Newbery selections continued to portray females in a biased, stereotypical, or less than positive manner.

For example, A String in the Harp (Bond), Dr. DeSoto (Steig), and A Ring of Endless Light (L'Engle) were explicit selections where females were shown to be obedient, subordinate, or passive. In contrast, many of the reviewed books depicted both females and males in a positive, non-gender-biased manner: Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry (Taylor), Bridge to Terabithia (Paterson), and A Solitary Blue (Voigt). Overall, Kinmann and Henderson (1985)

found that authors had developed a few strong, positive, female characters.

In a paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English, Singh (1973) described the sexism and racism in popular children's books such as Caddie Woodlawn (Brink) and The Matchlock Gun (Edmonds.) The content and illustrations of these and other pieces of children's literature were critically examined by pre-service teachers (teachers who have not yet completed their education) at Pennsylvania State University for "Gross stereotypes, subtle distortions, and omissions in references to ethnic groups" (p. 1). Singh suggested that by teaching prospective educators how to read children's literature critically, the educators will in turn teach students to be critical readers. If teachers and students read critically, their attitudes, specifically about gender-bias, may change. One needs to be aware of a problem before that problem can be addressed.

In a related study, Donlin (1972) described the gender-biased image of females in traditional works such as folk tales and nursery rhymes in his essay "The Negative Image of Women In Children's Literature." The researcher suggested that stories which portray females in the manner described below, perpetuate the idea of the "natural inferiority of women" (p. 611). Some of the most prevalent ideas presented (or subverted) in these works are that good females are inert (Cinderella, and Snow White, wait for the Prince to save them), less than intelligent (Snow White is tricked by her wicked stepmother three times), imperceptive (Little Red Riding Hood's Grandmother is unable to tell the difference between Red and the Wolf), passive (Rapunzel submits to all of the witch's demands), and dependent upon men (the miller's daughter in "Rumpelstiltskin" lets males make all the decisions in her life.) The most objectionable characteristic in Donlin's opinion is that the female characters "function in a moral vacuum... Their moral decisions are precluded by

the decisive actions of aggressive men to whom they submit passively" (p. 608).

In contrast, powerful, independent females are unattractive (the witch in "Hansel and Gretel" is an old, ugly, cannibal), evil (the witch in "Rapunzel" is a sadist who tortures Rapunzel and her mother), and revengeful (the fairy in "Sleeping Beauty" plots revenge for not being invited to Beauty's christening.) At the end of these stories, males (who are usually younger) defeat powerful females while enabling the passive females to live happily ever after. Other researchers have examined these stories for sexism as well.

Wantuck (1989) analyzed "Snow White," "Cinderella," and "Sleeping Beauty," three classic fairy tales written by the Brothers' Grimm, for evidence of sexism. Her findings were analogous to Donlin's:

The powerful women in Grimms' tales are usually portrayed in a harsh, malevolent manner. If a human woman has power, she is categorically evil. Only non-human women such as fairies can be powerful and good. Witches, step-mothers, ogresses and so on, have power over the insipid heroine, but they are not

stronger than the male hero....Ultimately, all are defeated by a younger male. (p. 5)

Fairy tales are very popular with children who have probably heard, read, or seen some version of this type of story. Other literature that is enjoyed by children often exhibits similar evidence of gender bias.

Purcell and Stewart; and Williams, Vernon, Williams, and Malecha (as cited in Olivares & Rosenthal, 1992) conducted studies which found that females are still (compared to the previous twenty years) outnumbered by males in storybooks. Furthermore, the activities performed by females and the types of career choices for females are gender-biased and restricted. Other researchers, Gonzales-Suarez and Ekstrom; and Tetenbaum and Pearson (as cited in Olivares & Rosenthal, 1992), reported similar findings. Main characters are portrayed in a gender-biased manner: females are dependent, passive and nurturing while males are independent, active and stoic.

The ensuing study by Purcell and Stewart (1990) replicated a study done in 1972 (with additional readers examined in 1975) by

Women on Words and Images. The 1975 study, *Dick and Jane as Victims*, found that males and females were portrayed in a stereotypical manner (as cited in Purcell & Stewart, p. 177, 1990).

Following the original study in method, Purcell and Stewart examined 62 children's elementary readers (containing 1,883 stories) in use in Texas in 1989 for sex-role stereotypes. The researchers found the following:

Girls appear just as often as boys...and are pictured in a wider range of activities...Women appear more often...but still not as often as men, or in as wide a range of occupations....Even though girls are now shown in active roles, they are still shown as needing rescue in many more instances than boys....[and] cannot help themselves out of trouble....boys are still portrayed...as being forced to deny their feelings to show their manhood....girls need a wider variety of working role models. (pp. 183-184)

Purcell and Stewart (1990) concluded that while improvements in sex role stereotyping had been made, further improvements in role models will "improve the quality of children's lives, and...improve the quality of tomorrow" (p. 184).

“Weaving Girls into the Curriculum” was the title of a paper about a study where the author (Goss, 1996) considered the types of gender bias stereotyping found in 45 books selected from the International Reading Association’s 1992 Children’s Choices book list.

Goss examined gender role models in the selected literature. She discovered that although males were still more prevalent in the books, the number of females and the role varieties for female characters had increased. Furthermore, females had some outdoor adventures where they sometimes rescued others.

Male gender stereotypes had also been examined. Goss determined that male characters were shown helping with traditionally female jobs such as housework and child care. In addition, males were shown to be less physical and more nurturing.

Goss concluded: “The books in the 1992 Children’s Choices show an improvement in the female models, but equality has not been

reached. This will happen when both sexes display equal amounts of all types of behaviors, activities, and jobs” (p. 8).

Gender Bias and Children's Gender Attitudes

Researchers (Ashby & Wittmaier, 1978; Olivares & Rosenthal, 1992; Scott, 1986; Scott & Summers, 1979) have suggested that reading non-gender biased literature had an influence on how children view sex-roles. Children who read stories about females in traditional and non-traditional occupations changed their attitudes about what females (and males) could and could not do. Olivares and Rosenthal (1992) noted that "a sexist curricula can make a difference in children's gender equity knowledge and values" (p. 13).

Ashby and Wittmaier (1978) conducted a study where 64 fourth grade students were divided into six groups. The groups were read two stories with females in traditional roles or two stories with females in non-traditional roles. Changes in attitude about what females could and could not do were measured by a picture choice test, two job checklists and two adjective checklists. The results of three of the five posttests were significant for females. (Although

males were included in the student groups, the researchers primarily examined the data for the female students.)

The data from a 1941 study by Thorndike; a 1953 study by Droney, Cucchiara and Scipione; and a 1967 study by Bond and Tinker (as cited in Scott & Summers, 1979) indicated that boys in fourth through ninth grade would not read stories about girls. Based on data collected, the researchers inferred that "Although there is no direct evidence pertinent to the identification issue [children identifying with the main characters] there is some research which suggests that boys do not like stories about girls" (p. 397).

Scott and Summers (1979) investigated the findings of Thorndike; Droney, Cucchiara and Scipione; and Bond and Tinker (as cited in Scott and Summers, 1979) by conducting a study with white middle-class boys and girls who were in either third or fourth grade. The students were read two versions of the same story, one with a female main character and one with a male main character. The researchers found that the "stories that portrayed females

engaged in traditionally male activities' were evaluated by boys and girls as favorably as stories that portrayed males engaged in the same activities" (p. 401). Results also suggested that portraying females in nontraditional role activities can affect the sex role perception of both girls and boys: "a positive, non-sexist presentation of females in children's books can contribute to an egalitarian view of the sexes. Children's reading material, then, can constitute a potentially important avenue for social change with regard to the elimination of sexism" (p. 401). While this research refuted the common myth that boys will not read stories about girls, it is apparent that girl characters must be portrayed in an interesting, active manner.

In a more recent but comparable study conducted by Scott (1986), students in grades 4, 7, and 11 read different sets of stories (appropriate to reading level) where the protagonist (the main character) had one of four roles: traditional female, nontraditional female, traditional male, or nontraditional male. Scott concluded that after reading about females and males in nontraditional roles, there

was an increase in the students' perceptions of what females and males "can and should participate in" (p. 113). Females preferred the stories with traditional female activities no matter what the gender was of the main character. Also significant was that the youngest students (fourth grade) "had the most flexible role attitudes and the eleventh graders had the most stereotypes" (p. 113). She also found that there was no effect on pupils' comprehension between the traditional and nontraditional content. In this study, males liked all the stories equally. "Of special significance is the potential for pupils to respond favorably to the depiction of males in nontraditional roles" (p. 115). This study, duplicating previous research findings, also refutes the common myth that males will not read material about females.

Goldberg (1994) completed one of the few studies where the researcher found no correlation between reading and discussing non-sexist books and gender stereotypical attitudes as expressed by subjects. Eighteen third-grade students completed a pretest to

determine the degree of gender stereotypical attitudes. Six gender neutral stories were read to the subjects after which the children completed a posttest. Goldberg's data indicated that "although there was a slight positive trend [t analysis revealed a value of .53], no significant difference was found between the pre-experiment and post-experiment test scores" (p. 8). Goldberg's research supports the findings of Beach; Kingston and Lovelace; and Tibbetts (as cited in Goldberg, 1994).

Another source cited by Goldberg (1994) was an annotated bibliography compiled by Rigg in 1985. Goldberg reported Rigg's analysis of children's literature which found that there are many stories with positive female roles such as Gretel, in "Hansel and Gretel"; Dorothy, in The Wonderful Wizard of Oz; and Charlotte, in Charlotte's Web. (Some research previously mentioned disagrees with Rigg's interpretation of what constitutes positive female roles.)

In 1996 Wellhousen indicated that children's understanding of gender roles could be supported through children's literature.

Different aspects of gender such as gender identification (identifying oneself as female or male), gender constancy (knowing that one's sex is determined by one's anatomy and cannot be changed) and gender-role stereotyping (classifying behaviors into categories based solely on gender) are understood at different levels by young children.

Wellhausen cites various researchers to explain these aspects:

By the age of three, most children are able to correctly identify themselves as boy or girl...Gender constancy develops around age six or seven...Once children have achieved gender constancy, they rigidly organize information from their world on the basis of gender, which results in gender-role stereotyping. (Berk, Santrock, & Kohlberg as cited in Wellhausen p. 79)

Wellhausen also suggested that adults can help children identify and change their gender-role stereotypes. "Ignoring or perpetuating children's gender stereotypes has a documented negative effect on children" (p. 80). Teachers, since they interact with a large population of children, are in a position to use literature and classroom discussion to influence their students' ideas about gender roles. "Children's literature can introduce or reinforce the idea of

gender fairness through the personalities, interests, and actions of various characters” (p. 80).

Teachers need to create classroom libraries which include books that portray females and males in a wide variety of gender roles, that use non-gender biased language, and that promote gender fairness. “Teachers can promote children’s understanding of gender and attitudes of gender fairness by sharing with children books that depict characters in nontraditional gender roles” (p. 83).

Gender Bias in Picture Books

Picture books have also been studied from various perspectives by many researchers such as Allen, Allen, and Sigler (1993); Collins, Ingoldsby, and Dellman, (1984); Kashey (1993); LaDow (1976); Patt and McBride (1993); Rose 1973); and Weitzman, Eifler, Hokada, and Ross (1972).

In what is often regarded as a landmark study, Weitzman, Eifler, Hokada, and Ross (1972) examined how sex roles were treated in Caldecott Medal winners and runners-up from 1938 (the first year of the award) to 1971, concentrating on the 18 books from 1967 to 1971.

One of Weitzman et al.'s major findings was that females "were simply invisible" (p. 1128). "Most children's books are about boys, men, and male animals, and most deal exclusively with male adventures. Most pictures show men....when women can be found in the books, they...[remain] inconspicuous and nameless" (p. 1128). The researchers proposed that the "invisibility" of females in book

titles may lead children to believe that females are not important because there are few or no books written about girls. This idea is often reinforced by the content of the award winning books. “In close to one-third of our sample of recent Caldecott books, there are no women at all....only two of the 18 books were stories about girls” (pp. 1129 & 1131).

Another major finding of the researchers was that “boys are active while girls are passive....and immobile” (pp. 1131-32). When girls do play, they play inside. “While boys play in the real world outdoors, girls sit and watch them” (p. 1133). Additionally, it was noted that the roles of adult women and men were similar to those of the children: “girls...play traditional feminine roles, directed at pleasing and helping their brothers and fathers” (p. 1134). Passive females of all ages are found indoors; they serve, follow, and get rescued while males of all ages are found outside engaging in activities where they lead and rescue. The roles of females appear to be tedious and limited, yet the roles of males seem to be diverse and

attractive. Weitzman et al. theorized that this portrayal and “encouragement of excessive dependency...[may] contribute to the decline in their [girls] achievement” (p. 1134). A decline in achievement for women was indicated by the fact that “*not one* woman in the Caldecott sample had a job or profession” [author’s emphasis] (p. 1141).

Motherhood was presented as the sole occupation for women, and it was presented in an artificial manner. (The portrayal of fatherhood was no less artificial.)

It is no disparagement of the housewife or mother to point out that alternative roles are available to, and are chosen by, many women and that girls can be presented with alternative models so that they, like boys, may be able to think of a wide range of future options. (p. 1143)

Lastly, the researchers observed, in contradiction to reality, that boys are shown as having friends and girls are mostly seen as working or playing alone. It was suggested by implication that “women cannot exist without men...The role of most of the girls is

defined primarily in relation to that of the boys and men in their lives” (p. 1136).

In light of their findings, Weitzman et al. concluded that the portrayal of leading roles in the majority of the sample Caldecott books reinforced traditional sex-role stereotypes:

Rigid sex-role definitions not only foster unhappiness in children but they also hamper the child’s fullest intellectual and social development....Through picture books, girls are taught to have low aspirations because there are so few opportunities portrayed as available to them....storybook characters reinforce the traditional sex-role assumptions...More flexible definitions of [both] sex-roles would seem to be more healthful in encouraging a greater variety of role possibilities. (pp. 1139 & 1146)

Later researchers also examined picture books (Caldecott winners and others) for gender bias. The results of those studies follow.

Collins, Ingoldsby, and Dellman, (1984) conducted a follow-up assessment of Weitzman, et al.’s 1972 study. Sixteen Caldecott Medal Award books and runners-up from 1979 to 1982 were

evaluated for sex-role distribution. The researchers formulated three main conclusions:

Male and female differences have decreased substantially toward more sexual equality....when women are in a central role, they appear to take on nontraditional characteristics; but when women are not in a central role, they revert to traditional female stereotypes....when divided by author's sex and analyzed, women authors appear to be more sexist than men authors. (p. 281)

Caldecott Medal Award winners and honor books were also the focus in a study completed by Dellman-Jenkins, Florjancic, and Swadner (1993). These researchers replicated the Collins et al. (1984) study examining books from 1989-1992. Dellman-Jenkins et al. analyzed the books' content for sex-role stereotyping and the portrayal of female roles. These researchers, unlike Collins et al., also examined the books for cultural diversity and androgyny ("displaying flexibility in gender-roles and/or behaving in ways that depict 'the best' of both masculine and feminine characteristics" (p. 77).

Dellman-Jenkins et al. (1993) determined that there was “an encouraging advance toward females becoming more visible in recent award winning books [although they are still] slightly under-represented in the number of illustrations” (p. 78). Moreover, their findings indicated an “advance toward greater gender equality in their portrayal of males and females in titles” (p. 79). Similarly, the authors seemed to be portraying more non-gendered characters. Lastly, Dellman-Jenkins et al. reported that there had been an overall “positive shift in the portrayal of nontraditional gender roles, for both males and females....[and] culturally diverse central characters was also found to be a predominant feature” (p. 80).

Rose (1973) also examined sex role myths in varied books by well-known authors such as Keats (Goggles), Lionni (Fredrick), Sendak (In the Night Kitchen), and Steig (Sylvester and the Magic Pebble.) Results indicated that both males and females had specific sex roles in many of the books. Females were portrayed as "dependent, fragile, inactive and safe...[who] do not make crucial

decisions, and [who] are frequently led by men or boys away from danger, and adventure as well" (p. 3-4). Males do not escape sex role stereotyping either. They are almost always portrayed as having "The qualities of courage, perseverance and creativity...[with] little or no home responsibilities" (pp. 1-2).

Rose stated the following:

The internalization of these myths has been found to have far-reaching implications for intellectual achievement and individual functioning....these sexual myths are destructive to females' self-image....there is a tendency for the more passive-dependent children to perform poorly on a variety of intellectual tasks and for independent children to excel....*for girls and women the evidence consistently points to masculinity as a correlate of intellectuality* [italics added]. (pp. 3-4)

In his conclusion, Rose also suggested that people need to be aware of sex role stereotyping in order to change it. Since sex role attitudes are internalized at a very early age, the materials children read and have read to them must reflect males and females in an equally positive manner. Other researchers arrived at different

conclusions after analyzing two periods of Caldecott Medal Award winners.

Twenty-two Caldecott Medal Award picture books (from 1938 to 1940 and 1986-1988) were scrutinized in 1993 by Allan, Allan, and Sigler. They concluded that there was minimal change in sex-role stereotyping in the Caldecott books for the two time periods examined. The researchers gathered data for 11 categories: characters in text, characters in pictures, total number of characters in pictures and text, gendered vs. neutered characters, number of images, characters in titles, central characters, central characters as active or passive, central characters as indoors or outdoors, central characters as traditional or nontraditional, and occupations. The researchers reported that while the representation of females increased in 4 of the 11 categories (text, images, titles, and central characters) males were still the dominant gender (three females to five males) in these same categories. Furthermore, the representation of gender-neutral characters (characters not identified by their sex)

had increased. Likewise, Allan et al. found that in the categories of being active, having nontraditional roles, and having diverse occupations, females, in the books from 1986-1988 period, were portrayed in a more “traditional and stereotyped” (p. 71) manner than in the 1938-1940 period.

LaDow (1976) investigated the portrayal of sex roles in 1,000 typical picture books found in the children's section of the public library in Mishawaka, Indiana. Features such as "the sex of the author and illustrator, the percentage of males or females represented in the titles, main characters, illustrations, role and activities of adults and activities of children" (p. 9) were analyzed. The results of the study indicated the following: less than 12 percent of the illustrations featured females only, while 40 percent of the illustrations featured males only; 13 percent of the main characters were female while 57 percent were male. Moreover, adult female characters depicted 17 different roles while adult male characters depicted 81 different roles. One of the largest differences was found in children's activities:

females participated in 74 different activities while males participated in 129 different activities.

LaDow determined that "females are under-represented and both males and females are limited to stereotypic roles: ...these books reinforce 'traditional' sex-roles....children...are likely to accept the sex-roles portrayed as immutable" (p. 26).

Comparable to the study by Ladow (1976), Kortenhaus and Demarest (1993) also attempted to determine whether gender bias in picture books was as prevalent as in the past. They examined 150 picture books for frequency of males and females found in illustrations, and they also analyzed content for the activities of the central characters in the books. Results indicated that "prior to 1970, children's literature contained almost four times as many boys in central roles, [and] almost twice as many boys in pictures....Children's literature published after 1970 shows a more equitable distribution of male and female characters in all categories" (p. 223). Additionally, Kortenhaus and Demarest's findings suggested that although the

frequency of females and males portrayed in the stories had become more equitable, "Girls are not being pictured in more instrumental activities, but are as passive dependent as 50 years ago. Boys are occasionally shown as passive dependent today, but are no less instrumental than 50 years ago" (p. 219). The findings of this study are consistent with the findings of Collins et al. (1984). Other researchers focused on the illustrations in popular children's books.

In related research, Kashey (1993) studied the illustrations in 74 volumes of the popular Berenstain Bear Series for gender bias. Only books published between the years 1962 and 1992 were examined; additionally, at least one of the immediate Berenstain Bears family members had to be in the story. The illustrations were examined according to the following criteria: how frequently characters participated in gender-stereotypic and gender-non-stereotypic occupations and activities; how often female and males appeared in the illustrations; and changes in trends in the previous two criteria over the 30 year publication dates of the series.

Kashey's (1993) findings suggested the following:

[there was] a basic, but insignificant, trend toward a less biased representation...as the years progressed...females...engaged in counter-gender-typed occupations more often than did males...Males who engage in more feminine or neutral activities may be considered "sissies"...[and] often feel less accepted than females labeled as "tomboys." (p. 16-18)

Resembling other studies of picture books, three areas of gender equity in preschool picture books were examined by Patt and McBride (1993): pronoun usage and gender of characters, the frequency of gender neutral pronouns and characters, and written text compared to teachers' wording when reading aloud. The authors collected data by examining 129 books that were available in four preschool classrooms, by observing the read-aloud habits of the teachers, and by having the teachers complete a questionnaire about how they chose books for the classroom. The results of the study indicated that "...the books available...contain an inequitable ratio of male to female characters and language...there is a noticeable invisibility [omission] of females in both [characters and pronouns] these areas" (p. 11).

Gender Bias in Related Areas

A report which confirmed Patt and McBride's (1993) findings was completed by Sheldon in 1990. In an article titled "Kings Are Royaler Than Queens," Sheldon described how "our language reflects sexist, male-centered attitudes that perpetuate the trivialization, marginalization, and invisibility of female experience" (p. 4). After examining language use in everyday activities, Sheldon found that "Most people use *he* much more often than *she*, using *he* to refer to someone or something that may not even be male" (p. 6): An observation reported by Sheldon but stated by Nicole, Sheldon's six-and-a-half-year-old daughter, reinforced this finding: "Kings are royaler than queens...because on Mr. Rogers when the trolley stops at the King and the Queen, the King answers the questions the most" (p. 7). In addition, Sheldon reported that "all-female or mixed-sex groups...[are often referred to] as 'guys' " (p. 6). Sheldon postulated that our language and our culture teach and reinforce gender stereotyping and a way to circumvent this learned behavior is to be

more precise in our language and to consciously chose words to describe activities in a more inclusive and gender neutral manner.

Sheldon remarked: "Language...is fundamental to the problem of how our culture construes women and how women interpret their lives. It is thus one of the social institutions that must also change" (p. 8).

A research review that examined studies of gender equity in classroom experiences mirrored the results found in the literature studies. Olivares and Rosenthal (1992) reported that "twenty years after education equity was mandated by Title XI in the Educational Amendment of 1972, gender equity, although not ignored, continues largely unresolved in the school environment" (p. 12). Not only does gender equity remain unresolved but,

fundamental elements of the school environment *remain which develop and reinforce inequity*: [emphasis added] teachers are unaware of their gender bias; there is a lack of school textbooks and other instructional materials that are sex-bias free; and children interact according to strongly stereotyped gender schemes....[although] improvement has been reached in sex equitable representation in...instructional material...there is a need to continue and increase the effort for classroom materials which promote gender equity....[gender-biased materials]

reinforce the influence of the media and suggest a potential effect on children's development of...sex-role expectations. (p. 12 & 13)

The “invisibility” of females in literature and in instructional materials available in classrooms was investigated by Blake (1995). In a two and a half year study in an urban fifth grade classroom, Blake investigated the “inextricable connection between girls’ reading, writing and voice” (p. 57). She found that there were few books obtainable in the classroom or the school library written by or about women. Most of the books examined were “white and about boys” (p. 59). Not having materials by and about women conveniently located in the classroom “sends a strong message: women are not capable of writing quality books, nor do women have quality experiences about which to write” (p. 59). Simply stated, females are “invisible” in some classrooms and schools which affects how females perceive themselves. Blake suggested that educators need to examine their choice of literature and instructional materials

so that there is “sex equity and gender balance through the curriculum” (p. 59).

Mirroring previously mentioned research is a study by Thompson and Zerbinos (1995) who examined gender bias in the media concentrating on television cartoons. The researchers determined that in the years from 1970 to 1980 “females have been under-represented on television programs, in commercials and even in cartoons; that females usually appear in lower status occupations if they are depicted as holding a job; and that female characters appear as less knowledgeable than male characters” (p. 651).

Conversely, in cartoons after 1980, the researchers found that there was a “significant change toward a less stereotypical portrayal of the characters, particularly female characters” (p. 651).

Specifically, Thompson and Zerbinos (1995) concluded that “female characters are now more independent, assertive, intelligent, competent, responsible and helpful than they used to be” (p. 669).

These changes in types of portrayal may have an influence on the

formation of gender roles. The subsequent study examines that influence.

Burnett, Anderson, and Heppner (1995) completed a study that questioned the influence of environmental factors on self-esteem and the formation of gender roles. Their findings were as follows:

This study found evidence in support of a masculine bias in American society...individuals who possess a larger amount of masculine characteristics such as decisiveness, independence, and competitiveness report greater self-esteem than do those with less of those traits...The correlates of masculinity—goal directedness, high achievement motivation, competitiveness, and assertiveness—are traits highly valued in this culture (Kenworthy; Locksley & Colton as cited in Burnett et al.)...Because the culture places a high value on masculine... characteristics, those individuals who show these traits perhaps receive more respect from others and hence enjoy greater self-esteem than individuals who display fewer of these masculine traits...gender roles, which were previously studied in isolation from environmental influences are embedded within a cultural context that can interact with one's personal traits. (p. 325)

Research about gender roles and the masculine bias in American society is quite recent. In succeeding years, other researchers will examine the views of Burnett, Anderson, and Heppner.

CHAPTER III

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to analyze Newbery Medal Award winning books from 1985 to 1995 for gender bias.

Research Question

The following was the research question:

Is gender bias present in Newbery Medal Award books from 1985 to 1995?

Methodology

Materials

The materials used in this study included the Newbery Medal Award winning books from 1985 to 1995 and a rubric developed by the author (see Appendix A).

Procedure

Each book was read and then evaluated using a rubric developed by the author.

The collected data were analyzed and tabulated.

Analysis of Data

A series of ratio comparisons were computed to determine the following:

- a) the number of females in titles to the number of males in titles
- b) the number of female authors to the number of male authors

- c) the number of female main characters to the number of male main characters
- d) if the main character(s) was active or passive
- e) if the main character(s) was depicted in a traditional or nontraditional role.

These determinations were based on definitions used by Davidson and Moore in 1992; Kaplan in 1992; and Lamanna and Reidman in 1991 (as cited in Dellman-Jenkins et al., 1993, p. 77) and are listed below:

1. Active – energetic action or activity
2. Passive – not participating or acting, compliant
3. Traditional – acting in accordance with tradition, females portrayed in subservient, homemaker roles and male characters portrayed in dominant, emotionally inexpressive roles
4. Nontraditional – displaying roles not in accordance with tradition, female characters portrayed in previously male

dominated roles and male characters portrayed in previously

female dominated roles

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Purpose of the Study

The major goal of this study was to analyze Newbery Medal Award winning books from 1985 to 1995 for gender bias. The study was also intended to promote and advance an awareness among educators and parents of how children have been portrayed in Newbery Medal Award books. It is imperative that people who interact with children be aware of gender bias. Previous researchers have suggested that gender bias in any context, be it literature, language, or social interactions, may affect children's views of who they are and what they are capable of doing.

A series of ratio comparisons were computed to determine the following:

- a) the number of females in titles to the number of males in titles

- b) the number of female authors to the number of male authors
- c) the number of female main characters to the number of male main characters
- d) if the main character(s) was active or passive
- e) if the main character(s) was depicted in a traditional or nontraditional role.

Findings and Interpretations of Data

A total of eleven Newbery Medal Award winning books were analyzed to determine the presence of gender bias. Two books, Joyful Noise: Poems for Two Voices and Lincoln: A photobiography were analyzed in only the title and author categories as one was gender neutral and the other was nonfiction.

In the first category (titles), 1 (9%) of the 11 books had a female in the title, 2 (18%) had males in the title, and 8 (73%) had neutral titles; that is, gender was not apparent in the title. In the second category (authors), 7 (64%) of the authors were female and 4 (36%) were male. In the third category (main characters), 6 (43%) of the 14 main characters were female and 8 (57%) were male. In the fourth category (role functions of main characters), 4 (29%) female and 8 (57%) male characters were active, and 2 (14%) female characters and zero male characters were passive. In the fifth category (traditional and nontraditional roles), 2 (14%) female and 8 (57%) male characters filled traditional roles while 4 (29%) females

and zero males filled nontraditional roles. Table 1 reflects a synthesis of the data collected.

Table 1

| | Number | Percent |
|------------------------|--------|---------|
| Titles | 11 | |
| Females in Titles | 1 | 9 |
| Males In Titles | 2 | 18 |
| Gender Neutral Titles | 8 | 73 |
| | | |
| | Number | Percent |
| Authors | 11 | |
| Female Authors | 7 | 64 |
| Male Authors | 4 | 36 |
| | | |
| | Number | Percent |
| Main Characters | 14 | |
| Female | 6 | 43 |
| Male | 8 | 57 |
| | | |
| Role of Main Character | Number | Percent |
| Active Female | 4 | 29 |
| Active Male | 8 | 57 |
| Passive Female | 2 | 14 |
| Passive Male | 0 | 0 |
| | | |
| Traditional Female | 2 | 14 |
| Traditional Male | 8 | 57 |
| Nontraditional Female | 4 | 29 |
| Nontraditional Male | 0 | 0 |

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Purpose of the Study

This study analyzed Newbery Medal Award winning books from 1985 to 1995 for gender bias.

Conclusions

Based on the data collected, overall, males were dominant in the Newbery Medal Award winning books examined. However, there appeared to be a trend where females as main characters were portrayed in a more active and nontraditional manner.

Findings of similarities between this study and previous studies indicated an increase in the number and variety of different roles for females. Males, on the other hand, still appeared to be stereotyped in most cases as indicated by their traditional active roles. No instances of passive or nontraditional males were noted.

An examination of the Newbery Medal Award books from 1985 to 1995 shows that the number of female main characters is almost equal to the number of male main characters (6:8). There are more active/nontraditional roles rather than passive/traditional roles for females (4:2). All in all, females were portrayed in a positive manner.

Many researchers have examined children's literature to determine whether strides have been made in eliminating gender bias and inequalities in children's books. Have there been significant changes? The answer is subjective and depends on the manner in which the data are analyzed.

Analysis of the selected texts suggested a trend of decreasing gender bias in children's literature as demonstrated by the close balance between female and male characters. Nevertheless, publishers, educators, researchers, and parents must continue to focus their attention on the content of children's literature. Persistent

attention will assure that gender balance, and not bias, will be the norm instead of the exception.

Literature has always been a means of preserving fundamental cultural values and standards thus making content important in influencing attitudes: Change content and attitudes may change. Books about boys differ from books about girls, not only in gender but also in content; the activities of a female main character often differ from those of a male main character. Children need role models that portray females and males in an equitable manner in number, types of behavior, and activities so that both genders are encouraged to reach their greatest potential.

Literature can stimulate and help develop the qualities of fantasy, imagination, and achievement. By improving the quality of the literature that children read, the quality of the children's lives and the quality of future society may also be improved. Literature alone cannot change children's attitudes, but it can contribute to such changes by expanding views...horizons...opportunities...dreams.

Implications for Research

While this study focused on gender bias in Newbery Medal Award books, further research should attempt to analyze all types of children's literature. Listed below are research questions for future consideration:

1. Are gender bias and stereotyped sex-role behaviors present in other child accessible areas such as television, films, and video tapes?
2. What type of language is used to refer to females and males i.e. are generic pronouns used?
3. Are teachers choosing non-gender biased materials for classroom libraries and lessons?
4. Would using non-gender biased materials have a strong, positive influence on the educational and occupational achievement of females?

5. Would using non-gender biased materials affect views on equality in gender roles as well as generate higher levels of self-esteem in females?
6. As reflected in children's literature, does American society appear to value traditional female activities less than traditional male activities?
7. Is there a cultural bias against female gender traits and toward male gender traits in American society as reflected in children's literature?
8. Are authors continuing to write gender biased literature for children that reinforces traditional sex-role stereotypes?

Implications for Classroom Practices

How children see themselves is often dependent on the role models they are provided. Educators need to be aware of gender bias, not only in children's literature, but also in classroom materials and practices. Educators are responsible for finding and using literature that provides females and males with equal opportunities, that demonstrates positive role models, and that shows respect for both female and male activities and gender traits.

Educators should also encourage children to think about gender roles by discussing the concept of stereotypes, the use of words and language, and how different characters are portrayed; by doing so, educators may be able to spur a change in children's attitudes.

Teachers, parents, and other people who interact with children have an obligation to review materials in order to choose and recommend books to children that can help them determine who they are, who they might become, and what they can do with their life choices.

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Appendix A

RUBRIC

Title:

Author:

Year of Award:

Gender of Author:

Main Character(s) & Role(s):

Active

Passive

Traditional

Nontraditional

The story is:

(1) female centered

(2) male centered

(3) mixed

(4) neutral

Comments:

Appendix B

SUMMARIES OF NEWBERY WINNERS FROM 1985 TO 1995*

1985 The Hero and the Crown Robin McKinley

A prequel rather than a sequel to *The Blue Sword* (1982) McKinley's second novel...set in the mythical kingdom of Damar centers on Aerin, daughter of a Damarian king and his second wife, a witchwoman from the feared demon-ridden North. The narrative follows Aerin as she seeks her birthright, becoming first a dragon killer and eventually the savior of the kingdom.

1986 Sarah, Plain and Tall Patricia MacLachian

When their father invites a mail-order bride to come live with them in their prairie home, Caleb and Anna are captivated by their new mother and hope she will stay.

1987 The Whipping Boy Sid Fleischman

A round tale of adventure and humor, that follows the fortunes of Prince Rowland (better known as Prince Brat) and his whipping boy, Jemmy, who has received all the hard knocks for the prince's mischief.

1988 Lincoln: A Photobiography Russell Freedman

The author begins by contrasting the Lincoln as legend to the Lincoln of fact. His childhood, self-education, early business adventures, and entry into politics comprise the first half of the book with the rest of the text covering his presidency and assassination.

1989 Joyful Noise: Poems for Two Voices Paul Fleischman

This collection of 14 poems for two voices explores the lives of insects. Designed to be read aloud, the phrases of the poems are spaced vertically on the page in two columns, one for each reader. The voices sometimes alternate, sometimes speak in chorus, and sometimes echo each other.

1990 Number the Stars Lois Lowry

Best friends Annmarie Johansen and Ellen Rosen must suddenly pretend to be sisters one night when Ellen's parents go into hiding to escape a Nazi roundup in wartime Copenhagen. With the help of a young resistance fighter, the Johansens smuggle the Rosens aboard Annemarie's uncle's fishing boat bound for freedom in Sweden. But it is Annmarie who actually saves all their lives by transporting a handkerchief coated with blood and cocaine to deaden the search dogs' sense of smell.

1991 Maniac Magee Jerry Spinelli

Orphaned at three, Jeffrey Lionel Magee, after eight unhappy years with relatives, one day takes off running. A year later, he ends up 200 miles away in Two Mills, a highly segregated community.

1992 Shiloh Phyllis R. Naylor

When he finds a lost beagle in the hills behind his West Virginia home, Marty tries to hide it from his family and the dog's real owner, a mean-spirited man known to shoot deer out of season and to mistreat his dogs.

1993 Missing May Cynthia Rylant

After the death of the beloved aunt who has raised her, twelve-year-old Summer and her Uncle Ob leave their West Virginia trailer in search of the strength to go on.

1994 The Giver Lois Lowry

Given his lifetime assignment at the Ceremony of Twelve, Jonas becomes the receiver of memories shared by only one other in his community and discovers the terrible truth about the society in which he lives.

1995 Walk Two Moons Sharon Creech

After her mother leaves home suddenly, thirteen-year-old Sal and her grandparents take a cartrip retracing her mother's route. Along the way, Sal recounts the story of her friend Phoebe, whose mother also left.

*All summaries were taken from:

Price, A. & Yaakov, J. (Eds.). (1996). The Children's Catalog (17th ed.). New York: Wilson.