
DEPICTION OF FEMALES IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

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Abstract: Everything we read constructs us, makes us who we are, by presenting our image of ourselves as girls and women, as boys and men. Children's books play a consequential part in developing children's language skills, but it additionally plays a paramount part in transmitting a culture to the child. It is a fact that gender roles are a paramount aspect in our culture and society, thus children's books contribute to the image children develop of themselves. The relative lack of girl characters in texts made for adolescent children limits the opportunity for girls to identify with their gender and validate their place in society. In other words, these stereotypes limit boys and girls liberation to express themselves due to the constraining gender roles present in stories they aurally discern not only in schools, but in their homes from the day they are born. Sundry media have been inculcated of stereotyping images of females and have been the center of many studies; however, most of the studies relating to portrayals of women in cognation to gender comportment patterns have fixated on the medium of advertising, and a majority of the studies that have analyzed gender stereotypes within children's literature have fixated on character prevalence in designations, pictures and central roles, and on gender differences in the types of roles and activities associated with the characters.

Introduction: "Picture books play a consequential role in early sex role socialization because they are a conveyance for the presentation of societal values to the puerile child. Through books, children learn about the world outside their immediate environment. They learn about what boys and girls do, verbalize and feel. They learn about what is erroneous, and they learn what is expected of children their age. In integration books provide children with role models – images of what they can and should be when they grow up" (Weitzman, 1972, p. 126). Despite the incremented range of vocation opportunities and lifestyles available to both sexes today, gender role stereotypes are still present and still engender negative connotations and consequences, especially for women. Gender stereotypes can thus be defined as "assumptions made about the characteristics of each gender, such as physical appearance, physical faculties, postures, fascinations, or occupations" (Gooden & Gooden, 2001, p. 90). For this reason, the present study will examine the portrayal of female images in children's picture books. Much has been indited on the topic of examining children's literature for gender stereotyping and on how children's literature may be utilized in the classroom to influence children's gender postures. Gender roles are not innate but learned, that is why childhood is a very paramount period in which a person learns his/her roles. Through all kinds of external stimuli children are constructed as boys and girls who deport in ways felicitous to their sex. Thus gender differences and hierarchy between sexes are imposed on children right from the commencement until they become gender stereotyped members of patriarchy. Literature is one of the most efficacious designates of contribution. to this process of appropriation. Children are put to slumber –not only literally but figuratively- with tales of comely but impotent princesses waiting for a handsome prince to preserve them. By betokens of fairy tales children learn which component they should play throughout their lives and they are admonished against the penalizations awaiting those who rebel. In the terminus they learn to take their roles for granted. This article discusses how children's literature is utilized during the process of gender appropriation, predicated on sundry scientific research results. to this process of appropriation. By designates of fairy tales children learn which component they should play throughout their lives and they are admonished against the penalizations awaiting those who rebel. In the terminus they learn to take their roles for granted. This article discusses how children's literature is utilized during the process of gender appropriation, predicated on sundry scientific research results.

How Is Gender Portrayed In Children's Literature?

Gender partialness subsists in the content, language and illustrations of an astronomically immense number of children's books (Jett-Simpson & Masland, 1993). This partialness may be optically discerned in the extent to which a gender is represented as the main character in children's books and how that gender is depicted. Numerous studies analyzing children's literature find the majority of books dominated by male figures. For example, Ernst (1995) did an analysis of denominations of children's books and found male names represented proximately twice as often as female designations. She withal found that even books with female or gender-neutral names in their denominations in fact, frequently revolve around a male character. Many classics and popular stories where girls are portrayed customarily reflect stereotypes of masculine and feminine roles. Such gender stereotypes are prevalent not only in mainstream children's books but additionally in Newbery and Caldecott medal victors. Children's books frequently portray girls as acted upon rather than active (Fox, 1993). Girls are represented as saccharine, verdant, conforming, and dependent, while boys are typically described as vigorous, adventurous, independent, and capable (Ernst, 1995; Jett-Simpson & Masland, 1993). Boys incline to have roles as fighters, adventurers and rescuers, while girls in their passive role incline to be caretakers, mothers, princesses in desideratum of rescuing, and characters that support the male figure (Temple, 1993). Often, girl characters achieve their goals because others avail them, whereas boys do so because they demonstrate ingenuity and/or perseverance. If females are initially represented as active and assertive, they are often portrayed in a passive light toward the terminus of the story. Girl characters who retain their active qualities are limpidly the exception (Rudman, 1995). Thus, studies designate that not only are girls portrayed less often than boys in children's books, but both genders are frequently presented in stereotypical terms as well.

Representation of Females in Children's Literature: Although more recent results of studies have discovered that gender differences in children's literature have decreased significantly toward more sexual equality, with female representation as main characters becoming impartial to that of male characters (Kinman and Henderson, 1996), there has still been much research in the past showcasing that this has been an issue for years and more needs to be done. Since the Weitzman et al. study, the issue of stereotyping in children's literature has been studied from a variety of different angles. As noted, the most popular way to address the issue has been to examine character prevalence and character roles and activities. Ladow (1979) analyzed several items based on a modification of the Weitzman et al. study and drew the same conclusions as Weitzman et al., except that males and male animals appeared in the illustrations four times more than the females and female animals. In 1981, Kolbe and LaVoie looked at changes in sex-role categorizing since the Weitzman et al. study. The study examined the presence of sexism in terms of ratio of female to male illustrations and characters in the book, as well as sex of the main character and sex-role portrayal. Through content analysis, McDonald (1988) found significant differences in the representation of male and female characters in a sample of children's picture books published between 1976 and 1987. Angela and Mark Gooden (2001) analyzed 81 Notable Books for Children from 1995 to 1999 for gender of main character, illustrations and title. The authors determined that steps toward equity had advanced based on the increase in females characterized as main characters; however, gender stereotypes were still significant in children's picture books. As hypothesized, female representation as the main character equally paralleled that of males, but males appeared alone more often than females in the illustrations. And, although there was an emergence of nontraditional characteristics and nontraditional roles showed by females and males, males still dominated the children's literature reviewed. In 1999, Tepper and Cassidy examined a different potential area of gender stereotyping, gender differences in emotional language in children's picture books. It was hypothesized that there would be a relationship between gender and the amount of emotional words associated with each characters, and that male characters would more often be related with emotional words considered appropriate for males, while female characters would more often be associated with emotional words reflected appropriate for females. The analysis of character prevalence showed that males had a higher representation in titles, pictures and central roles. However, contrary to the hypotheses, males and females were associated with equal amounts of emotional language, and no differences were found in the types of emotional words associated with males and females.

Conclusion: It is necessary to describe children's literature before we engage ourselves in understanding the literature. But any act of defining children's literature will be fraught with different viewpoints. Peter Hunt in "Defining Children's Literature" takes up this issue obviously to incorporate the various questions and probable answers raised in the attempt to define it. Hunt begins by clearly stating that there cannot be a single description of children's literature. Children's books differ from other literary works because they mostly revolve around the child protagonist. Books for small children are always written in very simple language; they use large prints and also have a lot of illustrations. Feminist critical theory is worried with the role, position and influence of women in a literary text for children. Several studies have examined the ways in which men and women are showed in children's literature. Following the path of feminist critics, the present research will continue to map the images of girls and women depicted in children's literature in India. This will be done by investigating the regular themes in the selected children's texts, such as the stereotypical depiction of women in the text and illustration, gender bias and gender discrimination against women, suppression and objectification of women. Children's reading materials are a widely available cultural resource that children may draw on to make sense of gender. Illustrations have conventionally placed females in passive observer roles, When a female is permitted to retain active qualities, the message transported to children is that she is the notable exception because all other girls in books are "normal." Over the past decades, increased female representation in titles, central roles, and pictures appears to indicate that more and more authors of children's books are aware of and sensitive to women's changing roles.

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