Sex-Role Socialization in Picture Books for Preschool Children[1]

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An examination of prize-winning picture books reveals that women are greatly underrepresented in the titles, central roles, and illustrations. Where women do appear their characterization reinforces traditional sex-role stereotypes: boys are active while girls are passive; boys lead and rescue others while girls follow and serve others. Adult men and women are equally sex stereotyped: men engage in a wide variety of occupations while women are presented only as wives and mothers. The effects of these rigid sex-role portraits on the self image and aspirations of the developing child are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Sex-role socialization constitutes one of the most important learning experiences for the young child. By the time the child enters kindergarten, he or she is able to make sex-role distinctions and express sex-role preferences. Boys already identify with masculine roles, and girls with feminine roles (Brown 1956). They also learn the appropriate behavior for both boys and girls and men and women. Hartley (1960) reports that, by the time they are four, children realize that the primary feminine role is housekeeping, while the primary masculine role is wage earning.

In addition to learning sex-role identification and sex-role expectations, boys and girls are socialized to accept society's definition of the relative worth of each of the sexes and to assume the personality characteristics that are "typical" of members of each sex. With regard to relative status, they learn that boys are more highly valued than girls. And, with regard to personality differences, they learn that boys are active and achieving while girls are passive and emotional. Eight-year-old boys describe girls as clean, neat, quiet, gentle, and fearful, while they describe adult women as unintelligent, ineffective, unadventurous, nasty, and exploitative (Hartley 1959). Indeed, Maccoby finds that, although girls begin life as better

[1] We are indebted to William J. Goode, Kai Erikson, Alice Rossi, and Erving Goffman for their insightful comments on an earlier draft of this paper which was presented to the 1971 meeting of the American Sociological Association, Denver, Colorado.

achievers than boys, they gradually fall behind as they become socialized (Maccoby 1966).

In this paper we wish to concentrate on one aspect of sex-role socialization: the socialization of preschool children through picture books. Picture books play an important role in early sex-role socialization because they are a vehicle for the presentation of societal values to the young child. Through books, children learn about the world outside of their immediate environment: they learn about what other boys and girls do, say, and feel; they learn about what is right and wrong; and they learn what is expected of children their age. In addition, books provide children with role models—images of what they can and should be like when they grow up.

Children's books reflect cultural values and are an important instrument for persuading children to accept those values. They also contain role prescriptions which encourage the child to conform to acceptable standards of behavior. The Child Study Association (1969), aware of the socialization potential of books, states that a book's emotional and intellectual impact on a young reader must be considered. Therefore it recommends that children's books present positive ethical values.

Because books for young children explicitly articulate the prevailing cultural values, they are an especially useful indicator of societal norms.[2] McClelland (1961) used children's books as indicators of achievement values in his cross-cultural study of economic development. In the period prior to increased economic development he found a high incidence of achievement motivation reflected in the children's books. This indicated a strong positive relationship between achievement imagery in children's stories and subsequent economic growth. McClelland (1961, p. 71) noted that the stories had provided children with clear "instructive" messages about normative behavior. Margaret Mead also commented that "a culture has to get its values across to its children in such simple terms that even a behavioral scientist can understand them."[3]

STUDY DESIGN

Our study focuses on picture books for the preschool child. These books are often read over and over again at a time when children are in the process of developing their own sexual identities. Picture books are read to

[2] Erving Goffman has questioned the direct relationship we have postulated between the themes in children's literature and societal values. He suggests that literary themes may provide alternative cultural norms or irrelevant fantasy outlets. Unfortunately, we do not know of any research other than McClelland's (1961) supporting either our own formulation or Goffman's.

[3] As quoted in McClelland (1961, p. 71).

children when they are most impressionable, before other socialization influences (such as school, teachers, and peers) become more important at later stages in the child's development.

We have chosen to examine how sex roles are treated in those children's books identified as the "very best": the winners of the Caldecott Medal. The Caldecott Medal is given by the Children's Service Committee of the American Library Association for the most distinguished picture book of the year. The medal is the most coveted prize for preschool books. Books on the list of winners (and runners-up) are ordered by practically all children's libraries in the United States. Teachers and educators encourage children to read the Caldecotts, and conscientious parents skim the library shelves looking for those books that display the impressive gold seal which designates the winners. The Caldecott award often means sales of 60,000 books for the publisher, and others in the industry look to the winners for guidance in what to publish (Nilsen 1970).

Although we have computed a statistical analysis of all the Caldecott winners from the inception of the award in 1938, we have concentrated our intensive analysis on the winners and runners-up for the past five years. Most of the examples cited in this paper are taken from the 18 books in this latter category.[4]

In the course of our investigation we read several hundred picture books and feel that we can assert, with confidence, that our findings are applicable to the wide range of picture books. In fact, the Caldecott winners are clearly less stereotyped than the average book, and do not include the most blatant examples of sexism.

In order to assure ourselves of the representativeness of our study, we have also examined three other groups of childrens books: the Newbery Award winners, the Little Golden Books, and the "prescribed behavior" or etiquette books.

The Newbery Award is given by the American Library Association for the best book for school-age children. Newbery books are for children who can read, and are therefore directed to children in the third to sixth grades.

The Little Golden Books we have sampled are the best sellers in children's books, since we have taken only those Little Golden Books that sold over three million copies.[5] These books sell for 39 cents in grocery

[4] The Caldecott winners and runners-up for the past five years are: 1967 winner (Ness 1967), 1967 runner-up (Emberley 1967*b*); 1968 winner (Emberley 1967*a*), 1968 runners-up (Lionni 1967; Yashimo 1967; Yolen 1967); 1969 winner (Ronsome 1968), 1969 runner-up (Dayrell 1968); 1970 winner (Steig 1969), 1970 runners-up (Keats 1969; Lionni 1969; Preston 1969; Turkle 1969; Zemach 1969); 1971 winner (Haley 1970), 1971 runners-up (Sleater 1970; Lobel 1970; Sendak 1970).

[5] We wish to thank Robert Garlock, product manager of Little Golden Books, for his help with this information and for furnishing many of the books themselves.

stores, Woolworth's, Grant's, and toy and game stores. Consequently, they reach a more broadly based audience than do the more expensive Caldecott winners.

The last type of book we studied is what we call the "prescribed behavior" or etiquette book. Whereas other books only imply sex-role prescriptions, these books are explicit about the proper behavior for boys and girls. They also portray adult models and advise children on future roles and occupations.[6]

If we may anticipate our later findings, we would like to note here that the findings from the latter three samples strongly parallel those from the Caldecott sample. Although the remainder of this paper will be devoted primarily to the Caldecott sample, we will use some of the other books for illustrative purposes.

THE INVISIBLE FEMALE

It would be impossible to discuss the image of females in children's books without first noting that, in fact, women are simply invisible. We found that females were underrepresented in the titles, central roles, pictures, and stories of every sample of books we examined. Most children's books are about boys, men, and male animals, and most deal exclusively with male adventures. Most pictures show men—singly or in groups. Even when women can be found in the books, they often play insignificant roles, remaining both inconspicuous and nameless.

A tabulation of the distribution of illustrations in the picture books is probably the single best indicator of the importance of men and women in these books. Because women comprise 51% of our population, if there were no bias in these books they should be presented in roughly half of the pictures. However, in our sample of 18 Caldecott winners and runners-up in the past five years we found 261 pictures of males compared with 23 pictures of females. This is a ratio of 11 pictures of males for every one picture of a female. If we include animals with obvious identities, the bias is even greater. The ratio of male to female animals is 95:1.[7]

Turning to the titles of the Caldecott Medal winners since the award's inception in 1938, we find that the ratio of titles featuring males to those

[6] The Dr. Suess books, although popular among preschool audiences, were not included as a supplementary sample because they represent only one author and one publisher rather than a more broadly based series. They do, however, conform to the general pattern of sex-role portrayal that we found among the Caldecott winners.

[7] The illustrations of Caldecott winners and runners-up since 1967 included 166 male people, 22 female people, and 57 pictures of both males and females together. The animal illustrations included 95 of male animals, one of a female animal, and 12 of both male and female animals together. Together, this resulted in a total male/female ratio of 11:1. There were also 14 illustrations of characters without a sex.

featuring females is 8:3.[8] Despite the presence of the popular *Cinderella, Snow White, Hansel and Gretel,* and *Little Red Riding Hood* in the sample of Golden Books that have sold more than three million copies, we find close to a 3:1 male/female ratio in this sample.[9] The 49 books that have received the Newbery Award since 1922 depict more than three males to every one female.[10]

Children scanning the list of titles of what have been designated as the very best children's books are bound to receive the impression that girls are not very important because no one has bothered to write books about them. The content of the books rarely dispels this impression.

In close to one-third of our sample of recent Caldecott books, there are no women at all. In these books, both the illustrations and the stories reflect a man's world. *Drummer Hoff* (Emberly 1967*a*) is about a group of army officers getting ready to fire a cannon; *Frog and Toad* (Lobel 1970) relates the adventures of two male animal friends; *In the Night Kitchen* (Sendak 1970) follows a boy's fantasy adventures through a kitchen that has three cooks, all of whom are male; *Frederick* (Lionni 1967) is a creative male mouse who enables his brothers to survive the cold winter; and *Alexander* is a mouse who helps a friend transform himself (plate 1).

When there are female characters, they are usually insignificant or inconspicuous. The one girl in *Goggles* (Keats 1969) is shown playing quietly in a corner. The wife in *The Sun and the Moon* (Dayrell 1968) helps by carrying wood but never speaks. There are two women in *The Fool of the World* (Ronsome 1968): the mother, who packs lunch for her sons and waves goodby, and the princess whose hand in marriage is the object of the Fool's adventures. The princess is shown only twice: once peering out of the window of the castle, and the second time in the wedding scene in which the reader must strain to find her. She does not have anything to say throughout the adventure, and of course she is not consulted in the choice of her husband; on the last page, however, the narrator as-

[8] The statistics for titles of the Caldecott winners from the inception of the award in 1938 show eight titles with male names, three with female names, one with both a male and a female name together, and 22 titles without names of either sex. This resulted in an 8:3 male/female ratio. The statistics for titles of recent Caldecott winners and runners-up (since 1967) show eight titles with male names, one with a female name, one with both together, and 10 titles without names of either sex. This resulted in an 8:1 male/female ratio.

[9] The statistics for the titles of the Little Golden Books selling over three million copies show nine titles with male names, four with female names, one with both together, and 14 titles without the names of either sex. This resulted in a 9:4 male-female ratio.

[10] The statistics for the titles of Newbery winners since the inception of the award in 1922 show 20 titles with males names, six titles with female names, none with both, and 23 titles without the names of either sex. This resulted in a 10:3 male/female ratio.

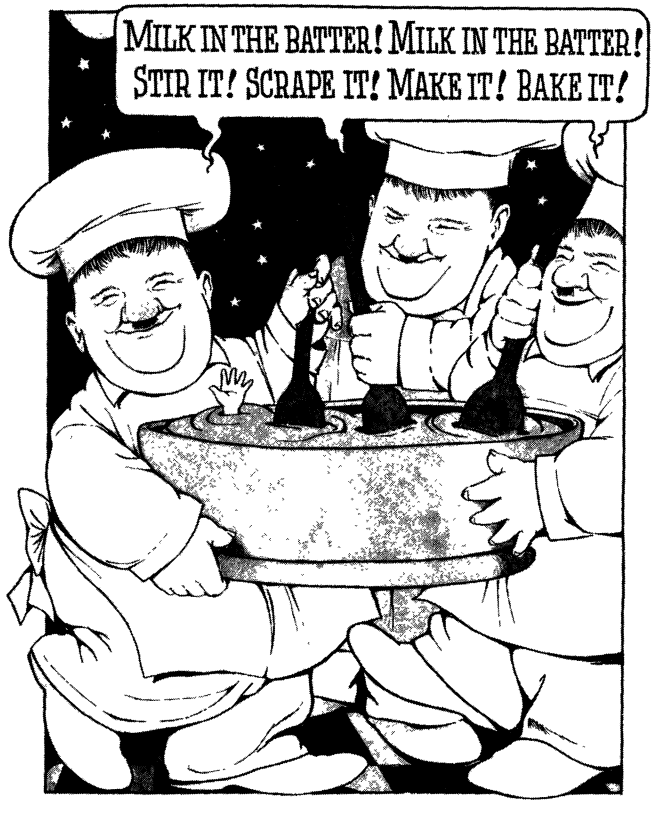

PLATE 1.—Maurice Sendak, *In the Night Kitchen* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970). (Reprinted with permission of the publisher.)

sures us that she soon "loved him to distraction." Loving, watching, and helping are among the few activities allowed to women in picture books.

It is easy to imagine that the little girl reading these books might be deprived of her ego and her sense of self. She may be made to feel that girls are vacuous creatures who are less worthy and do less exciting things than men. No wonder, then, that the child psychologists report that girls at every age are less likely to identify with the feminine role, while boys of every age are more likely to identify with the masculine role (Brown 1956).

Although there is much variation in plot among the picture books, a significant majority includes some form of male adventure. The fisherman in *Seashore Story* (Yashimo 1967) rides a turtle to a hidden world under the sea. After an encounter with a lion, Sylvester is transformed into a rock in *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble* (Steig 1969). *Goggles* (Keats

1969) tells of the adventures of Peter and his friends escaping from the big boys. In *Thy Friend, Obadiah* (Turkle 1969), Obadiah rescues a sea gull; the Spider Man outfoxes the gods in *A Story, a Story* (Haley 1970). A boy rescues his girlfriend from the moon god in *The Angry Moon* (Sleator 1970). The male central characters engage in many exciting and heroic adventures which emphasize their cleverness.

In our sample of the Caldecott winners and runners-up in the last five years, we found only two of the 18 books were stories about girls.[11] In one of these stories, *Sam, Bangs, and Moonshine* (Ness 1967), the girl has a boy's name. In the second, *The Emperor and the Kite* (Yolen 1967), the heroine is a foreign princess.

Each of these girls does engage in an adventure. Sam's adventure takes place in her daydreams, while the adventure of the princess Djeow Seow occurs when her father's kingdom is seized by evil men. Like the male central characters who engage in rescues, Djeow Seow manages to save her father, but she accomplishes this task only by being so tiny and inconspicuous that the evil men do not notice her. Although Djeow Seow is one of the two women central characters, the message conveyed to readers seems to be that a girl can only triumph by playing the traditional feminine role. Women who succeed are those who are unobstrusive and work quietly behind the scenes. Women who succeed are little and inconspicuous—as are most women in picture books. Even heroines remain "invisible" females (plate 2).

THE ACTIVITIES OF BOYS AND GIRLS

We can summarize our first findings about differences in the activities of boys and girls by noting that in the world of picture books boys are active and girls are passive. Not only are boys presented in more exciting and adventuresome roles, but they engage in more varied pursuits and demand more independence. The more riotous activity is reserved for the boys. Mickey, the hero of *In the Night Kitchen* (Sendak 1970), is tossed through the air and skips from bread to dough, punching and pounding. Then he

[11] The statistics for central characters in the Caldecott winners since 1938 show 14 males, 10 females, 6 males and females together, and 4 central characters without a sex. This results in a 7:5 male/female ratio. It is important to note that the situation is becoming worse, not better. During the last five years the ratio of male to female central characters has increased. The statistics for central characters in Caldecott winners and runners-up during the last five years show a 7:2 male/female ratio in contrast to an 11:9 male/female ratio for the years prior to 1967. The statistics for central characters in the Newbery winners since 1922 show 31 males, 11 females, 4 males and females together, and 3 central characters without a sex. This results in a 3:1 male/female ratio. The statistics for central characters in the Little Golden Books selling over three million copies show an 8:3 ratio of male/female people, a 5:2 ratio of male/female animals, and a 5:3 ratio of all males and females together.

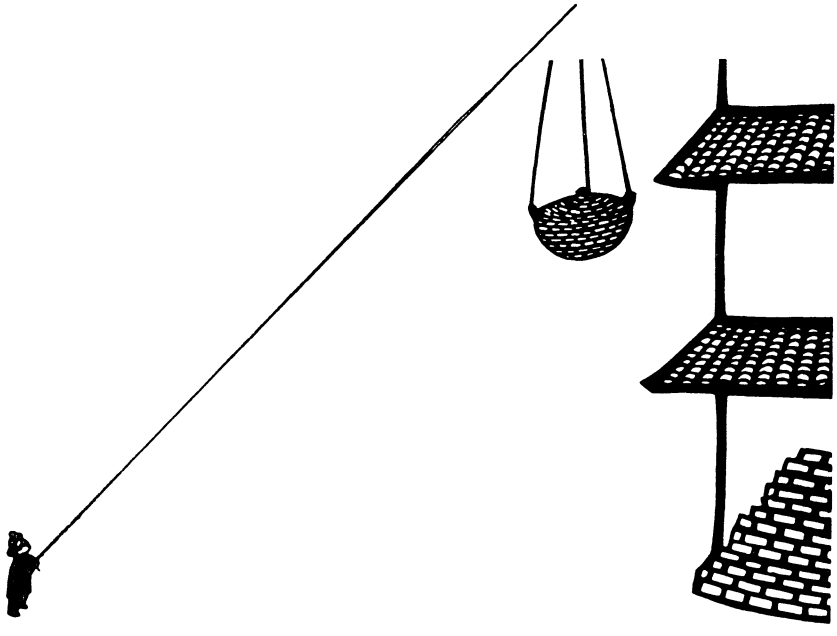

PLATE 2.—Jane Yolen, *The Emperor and the Kite* (Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1971). (Reprinted with permission of the publisher.)

makes an airplane and flies out into the night and dives, swims, and slides until he is home again. Similarly, Archie and Peter race, climb, and hide in the story of Goggles (Keats 1969). Obadiah travels to the wharf in the cold of Massachusetts winter, and Sylvester searches for rocks in the woods.

In contrast, most of the girls in the picture books are passive and immobile. Some of them are restricted by their clothing—skirts and dresses are soiled easily and prohibit more adventuresome activities. In *The Fool of the World and the Flying Ship* (Ronsome 1968), the hero, the Fool, is dressed in a sensible manner, one which does not inhibit his movement in the tasks he has to accomplish. The princess, however, for whom all the exploits are waged, remains no more than her long gown allows her to be: a prize, an unrealistic passive creature symbolizing the reward for male adventuresomeness.

A second difference between the activities of boys and girls is that the girls are more often found indoors.[12] This places another limitation on the

[12] The statistics for activities of boys and girls in Caldecott winners since 1967 show 48 male characters indoors, 105 male characters outdoors, 15 females indoors, and 26 females outdoors. This means that 32.6% of the males are shown indoors, while 36.5% of the females are shown indoors.

activities and potential adventures of girls. Even Sam, in *Sam, Bangs, and Moonshine* (Ness 1967), stays inside as she directs the activity of the book. Sam constructs a fantasy world and sends Thomas, a little boy, on wild goose chases to play out her fantasies. It is Thomas who rides the bicycle and climbs the trees and rocks in response to Sam's fantasy. Sam, however, waits for Thomas at home, looking out the windows or sitting on the steps (plate 3). Similarly, in the *Fool of the World* (Ronsome 1968),

PLATE 3.—Evaline Ness, *Sam, Bangs, and Moonshine* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1967). (Reprinted with permission of the publisher.)

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. This distinction parallels Erik Erikson's (1964) conception of the masculine outer space and the feminine inner space.

Our third observation deals with the service activities performed by the girls who remain at home. Even the youngest girls in the stories play traditional feminine roles, directed toward pleasing and helping their brothers and fathers. Obadiah's sisters cook in the kitchen as he sits at the table

PLATE 4.—Brinton Turkle, *Thy Friend, Obadiah* (New York: Viking Press, 1969). (Reprinted with permission of the publisher.)

sipping hot chocolate after his adventures (plate 4). In *The Emperor and the Kite* (Yolen 1967), the emperor's daughters bring food to the emperor's table, but their brothers rule the kingdom.

While girls serve, boys lead.[13] Drummer Hoff, although only a boy, plays the crucial role in the final firing of the cannon. Lupin, the Indian boy in *The Angry Moon* (Sleator 1970), directs the escape from the moon god (plate 5). He leads Lapowinsa, a girl exactly his size and age, every step of the way. Even at the end of the story, after the danger of the Angry Moon is past, Lupin goes down the ladder first "so that he could catch Lapowinsa if she should slip."

Training for a dependent passive role may inhibit a girl's chances for intellectual or creative success. It is likely that the excessive dependency encouraged in girls contributes to the decline in their achievement which becomes apparent as they grow older. Maccoby (1966, p. 35) has found that "For both sexes, there is a tendency for more passive-dependent children to perform poorly on a variety of intellectual tasks, and for independent children to excel."

The rescues featured in many stories require independence and self-confidence. Once again, this is almost exclusively a male activity.[14] Little

[13] The statistics for activities of boys and girls in Caldecott winners and runners-up since 1967 show a 0:3 ratio of males/females in service functions, and a 3:2 ratio of males/females in leadership functions.

[14] The statistics for activities of boys and girls in Caldecott winners and runners-up since 1967 show a 5:1 ratio of males/females in rescue functions.

PLATE 5.—William Sleator, *The Angry Moon* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1970). (Reprinted with permission of the publisher.)

boys rescue girls or helpless animals. Lupin saves a crying Lapowinsa from the flames. Obadiah saves the seagull from a rusty fishhook, and Alexander saves Willie, the windup mouse, from the fate of becoming a "tossed-out toy." In *Frederick,* Frederick's creativeness helps to spare his companions from the worst conditions of winter. In *Sam, Bangs, and Moonshine* (Ness 1967), Sam does not play the role of the rescuer although she is the central character. Rather, her father must step in and rescue Thomas and Bangs from drowning. In the end, Sam herself "must be" saved from the potential consequences of her fantasy.

Finally, we want to note the sense of camaraderie that is encouraged among boys through their adventures. For example, *The Fool of the World* depends upon the help and talents of his male companions (plate 6). In *Goggles* (Keats 1969), the two male companions together outwit a gang of older boys. Similarly, the bonds of masculine friendship are stressed by Alexander, Frederick, and Frog and Toad.

In contrast, one rarely sees only girls working or playing together. Although in reality women spend much of their time with other women,

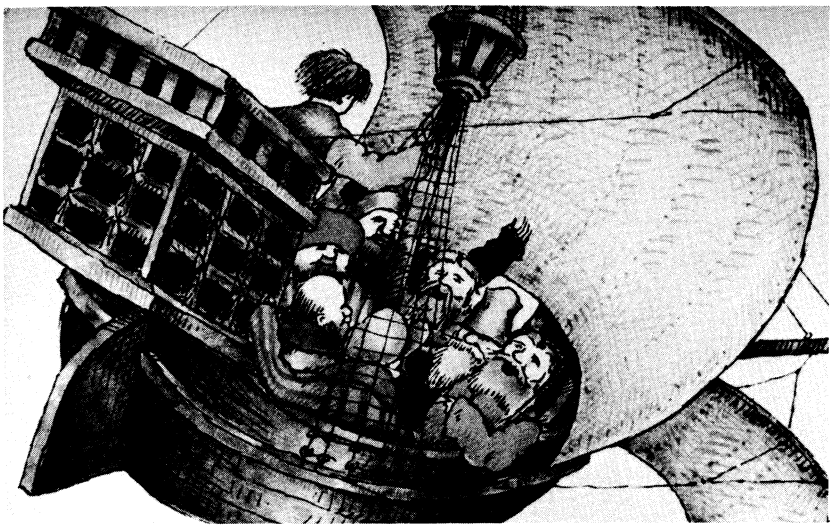

PLATE 6.—Arther Ronsome, *The Fool of the World and the Flying Ship* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1968). (Reprinted with permission of the publisher.)

picture books imply 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.[15] It is interesting to note that Sam turns to a boy, not a girl, to accomplish all of the activity of her fantasies. Her dreams would have no reality without Thomas.

The sex differences we have noted are even more apparent in the prescriptive or etiquette books. An excellent example is found in a pair of matched books: *The Very Little Boy* (Krasilovsky 1962*a*) and *The Very Little Girl* (Krasilovsky 1962*b*). Both books are written by the same author, follow the same format, and teach the same lesson: that little children grow up to be big children. However, the maturation process differs sharply for the very little boy and the very little girl.[16]

As we open to the first pages of the *Very Little Boy* (Krasilovsky 1962*a*) we find the boy playing on the living room floor by the fireplace. He has

[15] This problem is not confined to children's books. As Virginia Woolf pointed out over 40 years ago, women in literature are rarely represented as friends: "They are now and then mothers and daughters. But almost without exception they are shown in their relation to men. It was strange to think that all the great women of fiction were, until Jane Austen's day, . . . seen only in relation to the other sex. And how little can a man know even of that when he observes it through the black or rosy spectacles which sex puts upon his nose. Hence, perhaps the particular nature of women in fiction; the astonishing extremes of her beauty and horror" (1929, p. 86).

[16] We gratefully acknowledge Barbara Fried's imaginative analysis of these two books in her paper, "What Our Children Are Reading," written for Sociology 62a, Yale University, fall term, 1970.

already discarded a big rubber ball and is now making a racket by banging on a pan with a spoon. In contrast, the first page of the *Very Little Girl* (Krasilovsky 1962*b*) shows the little girl sitting quietly in a big chair. There is no activity in the picture: the little girl is doing nothing but sitting with her hands folded in her lap. This is our introduction to an angelic little girl and a boisterous little boy.

In the following pages the author compares the size of the children to the objects around them; we find that the boy is smaller than a cornstalk, his baseball bat, his sled, his father's workbench, and a lawnmower. In contrast, the little girl is smaller than the rosebush, a kitchen stool, and her mother's workbasket. We note that the boy will be interested in sports—in fact, both the basketball and sled are *his,* waiting there for him until he is old enough to use them. The girl has been given no comparable presents by her parents. She can only look forward to conquering the rosebush and the kitchen stool.

Even more important is the way in which each of them relates to these objects. The little boy is in constant motion, continuously interacting with the world around him. He is *jumping* up to touch the scarecrow next to the cornstalk, *unwrapping* his baseball bat (leaving the mess of paper, string, and box for someone else to clean up), *building* blocks on top of his sled, *reaching* up on tiptoe to touch his father's workbench, and *spraying* the lawn (and himself) with the garden hose. In contrast, the little girl relates to each of the objects around her merely by *looking* at them.

Similarly, when the author indicates what each child is too small to do, we find that the little boy is too small to engage in a series of adventures. The little girl, however, is too small to *see* things from the sidelines. Thus, we are told that the little boy is too small to *march* in the parade, to *feed* the elephant at the zoo, and to *touch* the pedals on his bike. But the little girl is too small to *see* over the garden fence and to *see* the face on the grandfather clock. Even when the little girl is trying to see something she appears to be posing, and thus looks more like a doll than a curious little girl.

The little girl's clothes indicate that she is not meant to be active. She wears frilly, starchy, pink dresses, and her hair is always neatly combed and tied with ribbons. She looks pretty—too pretty to ride a bike, play ball, or visit the zoo.

Little girls are often pictured as pretty dolls who are not meant to do anything but be admired and bring pleasure. Their constant smile teaches that women are meant to please, to make others smile, and be happy. This image may reflect parental values. In a study of the attitudes of middle-class fathers toward their children, Aberle and Naegele (1960, pp. 188–98) report that the parent satisfaction with their daughters seemed to focus on their daughters being nice, sweet, pretty, affectionate, and well liked.

If we follow the little boy and little girl as they grow up, we can watch the development of the proper service role in a little woman. We are shown that the girl grows big enough to water the rosebush, stir the cake batter, set the table, play nurse, and help the doctor (who is, of course, a boy), pick fruit from the trees, take milk from the refrigerator, prepare a baby's formula, and feed her baby brother. Conveniently enough for their future husbands, girls in storybooks learn to wash, iron, hang up clothes to dry, cook, and set the table. Of course, when the boy grows up, he engages in more active pursuits: he catches butterflies, mows the lawn, marches in the parade, visits the zoo to feed the elephants, and hammers wood at the workbench.

One particularly striking contrast between the two children is illustrated by the pictures of both of them with their dogs. In discussing how both have matured, the author tells us that both have grown up to be bigger than their pets. The picture of the little girl, however, makes us seriously doubt any grown-up self-confidence and authority. She is shown being pulled by a very small dog, whom she obviously cannot control. The little boy, in contrast, is in firm command of a much bigger dog, and does not even need a leash to control him (plates 7, 8).

It is easy to see why many little girls prefer to identify with the male role (Hartup 1962; Brown 1956). The little girl who does find the male role more attractive is faced with a dilemma. If she follows her desires and behaves like a tomboy, she may be criticized by her parents and teachers. On the other hand, if she gives up her yearnings and identities with the traditional feminine role, she will feel stifled. Girls who wish to be more than placid and pretty are left without an acceptable role alternative. They must choose between alienation from their own sex of assignment, and alienation from their real behavioral and temperamental preferences.

The rigidity of sex-role stereotypes is not harmful only to little girls. Little boys may feel equally constrained by the necessity to be fearless, brave, and clever at all times. While girls are allowed a great deal of emotional expression, a boy who cries or expresses fear is unacceptable.[17] Just as the only girls who are heroines in picture books have boys' names or are foreign princesses, the only boys who cry in picture books are animals—frogs and toads and donkeys.

The price of the standardization and rigidity of sex roles is paid by children of both sexes. Eleanor Maccoby (1966, p. 35) has reported that analytic thinking, creativity, and general intelligence are associated with cross-sex typing. Thus, rigid sex-role definitions not only foster unhappi-

[17] But Hartley (1959) also discovered that as a corollary the boys felt extreme pressure as a result of the rigid masculine role prescriptions which they saw as demanding that they be strong, intelligent, and generally successful. The boys believed that adults liked girls better because the girls were cute and well behaved.

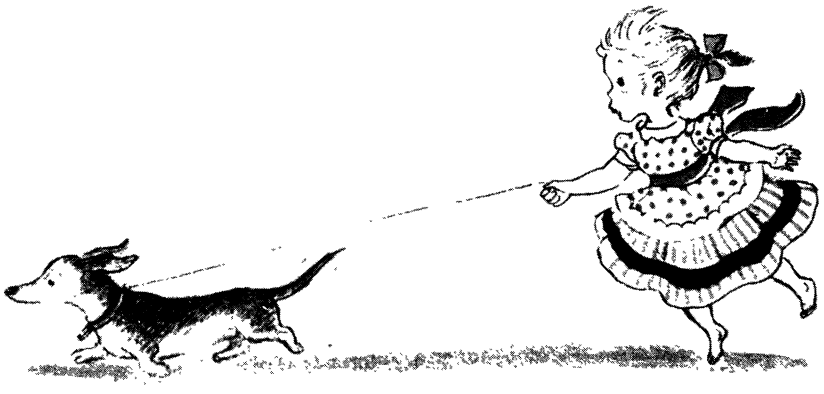

PLATE 7.—Phyllis Krasilovsky, *The Very Little Girl,* illustrated by Ninon (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1962). (Reprinted with permission of the publisher.)

ness in children but they also hamper the child's fullest intellectual and social development.

ROLE MODELS: ADULT MEN AND WOMEN

Adult role models provide another crucial component of sex-role socialization. By observing adult men and women, boys and girls learn what will be expected of them when they grow older. They are likely to identify with adults of the same sex, and desire to be like them. Thus, role models not only present children with future images of themselves but they also influence a child's aspirations and goals.

We found the image of the adult woman to be stereotyped and limited. Once again, the females are passive while the males are active. Men predominate in the outside activities while more of the women are inside. In the house, the women perform almost exclusively service functions, taking care of the men and children in their families. When men lead, women follow. When men rescue others, women are the rescued.[18]

[18] Among the Caldecott winners and runners-up for the past five years, we found

PLATE 8.—Phyllis Krasilovsky, *The Very Little Boy,* illustrated by Ninon (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1962). (Reprinted with permission of the publisher.)

In most of the stories, the sole adult woman is identified only as a mother or a wife. Obadiah's mother cooks, feeds him hot chocolate, and goes to church. The wife of the Sun God carries wood to help him build the house, but she never speaks. Sylvester's mother is shown sweeping, packing a picnic lunch, knitting, and crying. And Mrs. Noah, who had an important role in the biblical story of the flood, is completely omitted from the children's book version.

The remaining three roles that women play are also exclusively feminine roles: one is a fairy, the second a fairy godmother, and the third an underwater maiden. The fairy godmother is the only adult female who plays an active leadership role. The one nonstereotyped woman is clearly not a "normal" woman—she is a mythical creature.

In contrast to the limited range in women's roles, the roles that men play are varied and interesting. They are storekeepers, housebuilders, kings,

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that women were engaged in a much narrower range of activities then men. The ratio of male to female adults engaged in service activities was 1:7, while the ratio of male to female adults in leadership activities was 5:0, and the ratio of the male to female adults in rescue activities was 4:1. In addition, 40% of adult females, but only 31% of adult males, were pictured indoors.

spiders, storytellers, gods, monks, fighters, fishermen, policemen, soldiers, adventurers, fathers, cooks, preachers, judges, and farmers.

Perhaps our most significant finding was that *not one* woman in the Caldecott sample had a job or profession. In a country where 40% of the women are in the labor force, and close to 30 million women work, it is absurd to find that women in picture books remain only mothers and wives (U.S. Department of Labor 1969). In fact, 90% of the women in this country will be in the labor force at some time in their lives.

Motherhood is presented in picture books as a full-time, lifetime job, although for most women it is in reality a part-time 10-year commitment. The changing demographic patterns in this country indicate that the average woman has completed the main portion of her childrearing by her mid-thirties and has 24 more productive years in the labor force if she returns to work once her children are in school. Today even the mothers of young children work. There are over 10 million of them currently in the labor force (U.S. Department of Labor 1969, p. 39).

As the average woman spends even less time as a mother in the future, it is unrealistic for picture books to present the role of mother as the only possible occupation for the young girl. Alice Rossi (1964, p. 105) has noted that today the average girl may spend as many years with her dolls as the average mother spends with her children.

The way in which the motherhood role is presented in children's books is also unrealistic. She is almost always confined to the house, although she is usually too well dressed for housework. Her duties are not portrayed as difficult or challenging—she is shown as a housebound servant who cares for her husband and children. She washes dishes, cooks, vacuums, yells at the children, cleans up, does the laundry, and takes care of babies. For example, a typical domestic scene in *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble* shows the father reading the paper, Sylvester playing with his rock collection, and the mother sweeping the floor (plate 9).

The picture books do not present a realistic picture of what real mothers do. Real mothers drive cars, read books, vote, take children on trips, balance checkbooks, engage in volunteer activities, ring doorbells canvassing, raise money for charity, work in the garden, fix things in the house, are active in local politics, belong to the League of Women Voters and the PTA, etc.[19]

Nor do these picture books provide a realistic image of fathers and husbands. Fathers never help in the mundane duties of child care. Nor do husbands share the dishwashing, cooking, cleaning, or shopping. From these stereotyped images in picture books, little boys may learn to expect

[19] Only one of the Caldecott winners presents the woman as an active equal to her husband. It is Edna Mitchell Preston's *Pop Corn and Ma Goodness* (1969) (see plate 10).

PLATE 9.—William Steig, *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1969). (Reprinted with permission of the publisher.)

their wives to do all the housework and to cater to their needs. These unreal expectations of marriage will inevitably bring disappointment and discontent to both the male and the female partners.

Lonnie Carton's two books, *Mommies* (1960*b*) and *Daddies* (1960*a*), are excellent examples of the contrasting lives to which boys and girls can look forward if they follow the role models provided by the adult characters in picture books. As the books begin, Mommy puts on her apron to prepare for a day of homemaking, while Daddy dashes out of the house with his briefcase on the way to work. The next two pages show the real differences between the woman's world and the man's world. Daddies are shown as carpenters, executives, house painters, mailmen, teachers, cooks, and storekeepers. They are also the bearers of knowledge.

> Daddies drive the trucks and cars,
> The buses, boats and trains.
> Daddies build the roads and bridges,
> Houses, stores and planes.

Daddies work in factories and
Daddies make the things grow.
Daddies work to figure out
The things we do not know (1960).

On the corresponding two pages (in *Mommies*), we learn that, although the mother supposedly does "lots and lots," her tasks consist of washing dishes, scrubbing pots and walls, cooking, baking, tying shoes, catching balls, and answering questions (which seems to be her most "creative" role so far). Mommy does leave the house several times but only to shop for groceries or to take the children out to play. (She does drive a car in this book, however, which is unusual.)

In contrast, when Daddy comes home he not only plays in a more exciting way with the children but he provides their contact with the outside world. While Mommies are restrictive, and "shout if you play near the street," Daddies take you on trips in cars, buses, and trains; Daddies take you to the circus, park, and zoo; buy you ice cream; and teach you to swim. Daddies also understand you better because they "know you're big enough and brave enough to do lots of things that mommies think are much too hard for you." Mothers, however, are useful for taking care of you when you are sick, cleaning up after you, and telling you what to do. Mommies do smile, hug, comfort, and nurture, but they also scold and instruct in a not altogether pleasant manner. They tell you to be quiet, and to "Sit still and eat!" Ironically, this negative image of the nagging mother may be a result of an exclusive devotion to motherhood. As Alice Rossi has observed: "If a woman's adult efforts are concentrated exclusively on her children, she is likely more to stifle than broaden her children's perspective and preparation for adult life. . . . In myriad ways the mother binds the child to her, dampening his initiative, resenting his growing independence in adolescence, creating a subtle dependence which makes it difficult for the child to achieve full adult stature" (1964, p. 113).

In addition to having a negative effect on children, this preoccupation with motherhood may also be harmful to the mother herself. Pauline Bart (1970, p. 72) has reported extreme depression among middle-aged women who have been overinvolved with and have overidentified with their children.

We have already noted that there are no working women in the Caldecott sample. It is no disparagement of the housewife or mother to point out that alternative roles are available to, and 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.

Because there are no female occupational role models in the Caldecott books, we will turn to the prescribed role books to examine the types of occupations that are encouraged for boys and girls. For this analysis we

will compare a very popular pair of Hallmark matched books: *What Boys Can Be* (Walley, n.d., *a*) and *What Girls Can be* (Walley, n.d., *b*). Both books follow the same format: each page shows a boy or a girl playing an occupational role. We are told that boys can be:

> *a fireman* who squirts water on the flames, and
> *a baseball* player who wins lots of games.
> *a bus driver* who helps people travel far, or
> *a policeman* with a siren in his car.
> *a cowboy* who goes on cattle drives, and
> *a doctor* who helps to save people's lives.
> *a sailor* on a ship that takes you everywhere, and
> *a pilot* who goes flying through the air.
> *a clown* with silly tricks to do, and
> a pet tiger owner who *runs the zoo.*
> *a farmer* who drives a big red tractor, and
> on TV shows, if I become *an actor.*
> *an astronaut* who lives in a space station, and
> someday grow up to be *President* of the nation
>
> [Emphasis added; Walley, n.d., *a*]

The second book tells us that girls can be:

> *a nurse,* with white uniforms to wear, or
> *a stewardess,* who flies everywhere.
> *a ballerina,* who dances and twirls around, or
> *a candy shop owner,* the best in town.
> *a model,* who wears lots of pretty clothes,
> *a big star* in the movies and on special TV shows.
> *a secretary* who'll type without mistakes, or
> *an artist,* painting trees and clouds and lakes.
> *a teacher in nursery school* some day, or
> *a singer* and make records people play.
> *a designer of dresses* in the very latest style, or
> *a bride,* who comes walking down the aisle.
> *a housewife,* someday when I am grown, and
> *a mother,* with some children of my own
>
> [Emphasis added; Walley, n.d., *b*]

The two concluding pictures are the most significant; the ultimate goal for which little boys are to aim is nothing less than the president of the nation. For girls, the comparable pinnacle of achievement is motherhood!

Many of the differences in the occupations in these two books parallel the male/female differences we have already noted. One is the inside/outside distribution. Eleven of the female occupations are shown being performed inside, while only three are outside. Indeed, none of the female occupations listed necessitates being performed outdoors. The ratio for the male occupations is exactly reversed: three are inside, 11 outside.

We already observed that little girls are encouraged to succeed by look-

ing pretty and serving others. It should therefore not be surprising to find that the women are concentrated in glamorous and service occupations. The most prestigious feminine occupations are those in which a girl can succeed only if she is physically attractive. The glamour occupations of model and movie star are the two most highly rewarded among the female choices. Since few women can ever achieve high status in these glamorous professions, the real message in these books is that women's true function lies in service. Service occupations, such as nurse, secretary, housewife, mother, and stewardess, reinforce the traditional patterns to feminine success.

Although some of the male occupations also require physical attractiveness (actor) and service (but driver), there is a much greater range of variation in the other skills they require: baseball players need athletic ability, policemen are supposed to be strong and brave, pilots and doctors need brains, astronauts need mechanical skills and great energy, clowns must be clever and funny, and presidents need political acumen.

If we compare the status level of the male and female occupations, it is apparent that men fill the most prestigious and highly paid positions. They are the doctors, pilots, astronauts, and presidents. Even when men and women are engaged in occupations in the same field, it is the men who hold the positions which demand the most skill and leadership. While men are doctors, women are nurses; while men are pilots, women are stewardesses. Only one of the women is engaged in a professional occupation: the teacher. It is important to note, however, that the authors carefully specified that she was a *nursery school teacher.*

Similarly, most of the occupations that require advanced education are occupied by men. Four of the males have apparently gone to college, compared with only one of the women.

It is clear that the book *What Boys Can Be* encourages a little boy's career ambitions. He is told that he has the potential for achieving any of the exciting and highly rewarded occupations in our society.

In contrast, the book *What Girls Can Be* tells the little girl that she can have ambitions if she is pretty. Her potential for achieving a prestigious and rewarding job is dependent on her physical attributes. If she is not attractive, she must be satisfied with a life of mundane service. No women are represented in traditional male occupations, such as doctor, lawyer, engineer, or scientist. With women comprising 7% of the country's physicians and 4% of its lawyers, surely it is more probable that a girl will achieve one of these professional statuses than it is that a boy will become president.

The occupational distribution presented in these books is even worse than the real inequitable distribution of employment in the professions. Picture books could inspire children to strive for personal and occupa-

tional goals that would take them beyond their everyday world. Instead, women are denied both the due recognition for their present achievements and the encouragement to aspire to more broadly defined possibilities in the future.

CONCLUSION

Preschool children invest their intellects and imaginations in picture books at a time when they are forming their self-images and future expectations. Our study has suggested that the girls and women depicted in these books are a dull and stereotyped lot. We have noted that little girls receive attention and praise for their attractiveness, while boys are admired for their achievements and cleverness. Most of the women in picture books have status by virtue of their relationships to specific men—they are the wives of the kings, judges, adventurers, and explorers, but they themselves are not the rulers, judges, adventurers, and explorers.

Through picture books, girls are taught to have low aspirations because there are so few opportunities portrayed as available to them. The world of picture books never tells little girls that as women they might find fulfillment outside of their homes or through intellectual pursuits. Women are excluded from the world of sports, politics, and science. Their future occupational world is presented as consisting primarily of glamour and service. Ironically, many of these books are written by prize-winning female authors whos own lives are probably unlike those they advertise.[20]

It is clear that the storybook characters reinforce the traditional sex-role assumptions. Perhaps this is indicative of American preferences for creativeness and curiosity in boys and neatness and passivity in girls. Many parents want their sons to grow up to be brave and intelligent and their daughters to be pretty and compliant.

In the past, social theorists have assumed that such strongly differentiated sex roles would facilitate a child's identification with the parent of the same sex. For example, Talcott Parsons (1955) has commented that "if the boy is to identify with his father there must be discrimination in role terms between the two parents" (1955, p. 80). More recently, however, Philip Slater (1964) has argued that adult role models who exhibit stereotyped sex-role differentiation may impede, rather than facilitate, the child's sex-role identification. Children find it easier to identify with less differentiated and less stereotyped parental role models. It is easier for

[20] A tabulation of the percentage of female authors indicates that 41% of the Caldecott and 58% of the Newbery Medal winners were written by women. However, women authors appear to be more positive than their male counterparts. The pre-1967 Caldecotts, which had a larger percentage of female central characters, also have a larger percentage of female authors: 48% compared with 33%.

them to internalize parental values when nurturance (the typically feminine role) and discipline (the typically masculine role) come from the same person.

Not only do narrow role definitions impede the child's identification with the same sex parent, but rigid sex-role distinctions may actually be harmful to the normal personality development of the child. In fact, Slater (1964) has postulated a negative relationship between the child's emotional adjustment and the degree of parental role differentiation.

Some evidence, then, suggests these sex roles are rigid and possibly harmful. They discourage and restrict a woman's potential and offer her fulfillment only through the limited spheres of glamour and service. More flexible definitions of sex roles would seem to be more healthful in encouraging a greater variety of role possibilities. Stories could provide a more positive image of a woman's potential—of her physical, intellectual, creative, and emotional capabilities.

Picture books could also present a less stereotyped and less rigid definition of male roles by encouraging boys to express their emotions as well as their intellect. Books might show little boys crying, playing with stuffed toys and dolls, and helping in the house. Stereotypes could be weakened by books showing boys being rewarded for being emotional and supportive, and girls being rewarded for being intelligent and adventuresome.

Although Zelditch (1955, p. 341) has noted the cross-cultural predominance of males in instrumental roles and females in expressive roles—like the patterns we found in children's books—Slater (1964) suggests that the ability to alternate instrumental and expressive role performance rapidly—what he calls interpersonal flexibility—is coming to be more highly valued in our society.

This argues for less stereotyped adult roles. Fathers could take a more active role in housework and child care. And, similarly, the roles of adult women could be extended beyond the limited confines of the home, as in face they are. When women are shown at home, they could be portrayed as the busy and creative people that many housewives are. For example, the woman in *Pop Corn and Ma Goodness*, the single exception to the Caldecott norm, equally shares diversified activities with her husband (plate 10).

If these books are to present real-life roles, they could give more attention to single parents and divorced families. Stories could present the real-life problems that children in these families face: visiting a divorced father, having two sets of parents, not having a father at school on father's day, or having a different name than one's mother.

The simplified and stereotyped images in these books present such a narrow view of reality that they must violate the child's own knowledge

PLATE 10.—Edna Mitchell Preston, *Pop Corn and Ma Goodness* (New York: Viking Press, 1969). (Reprinted with permission of the publisher.)

of a rich and complex world.[21] Perhaps these images are motivated by the same kind of impulse that makes parents lie to their children in order to "protect" them.[22] As a result, the child is given an idealized version of the truth, rather than having his real and pressing questions answered. Not only are the child's legitimate questions ignored, but no effort is made to create a social awareness which encompasses the wider society. Picture books actually deny the existence of the discontented, the poor, the ethnic minorities, and the urban slum dwellers.

Stories have always been a means for perpetuating the fundamental cultural values and myths. Stories have also been a stimulus for fantasy imagination and achievement. Books could develop this latter quality to encourage the imagination and creativity of all children. This would provide an important implementation of the growing demand for *both* girls and boys to have a real opportunity to fulfill their human potential.

[21] We are indebted to William J. Goode for this insight.

[22] This is not to deny the value of fantasy. As Margaret Fuller wrote in 1855: "Children need some childish talk, some childish play, some childish books. But they also need, and need more, difficulties to overcome, and a sense of the vast mysteries which the progress of their intelligence shall aide them to unravel. This sense is naturally their delight . . . and it must not be dulled by premature explanations or subterfuges of any kind" (pp. 310–13). Alice Rossi brought this work to our attention.

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