

THE MEASUREMENT OF SEX-ROLE STEREOTYPES
IN CHILDREN'S PICTURE BOOKS

By

BARBARA A. BROWN

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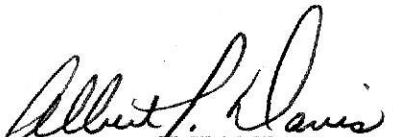
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION, REVIEW OF LITERATURE,
AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

Introduction

Young children's attitudes, behaviors, and aspirations related to sex-role are probably socialized through a variety of sources including family, preschools, peers, and media. Picture books, as one form of media, are an important source of sex-role information for preschool age children. Since picture books are usually the first books children experience (Huck and Kuhn, 1968), the portrayal of males and females in these books may significantly contribute to the child's formulation of socially acceptable sex-role behaviors and attitudes. Like other forms of media, picture books serve to reinforce behavior and attitudes already experienced within the child's immediate environment, and also often serve to extend his experiences and awarenesses beyond the familiar bounds of the child's everyday world.

The importance of books as potential socializing agents for children has been attested to by numerous researchers (Weitzman, et al., 1972; Kummel, 1970; Zimet, 1968). Child, Potter, and Levine (1946) state:

It is assumed that in reading a story, a child goes through symbolically, or rehearses to himself, the episode that is being described. The same principles, then, are expected to govern the effect of the reading on him as would govern the effect of actually going through such an incident in real life (p. 3).

Kohlberg (1966), in discussing children's acquisition of sex-role conceptualizations, hypothesized that children do actively and cognitively restructure their sex-role concepts and values based on their experiences. Mischel (1966) postulates that observational learning from either live or symbolic models is a basic step in acquiring sex-typed behaviors. The picture book, therefore, provides the young child with influential and salient role models. By "rehearsing" or "observing" various behaviors, attitudes and events, the child may internalize them and begin to incorporate them into his own sex-role behaviors, attitudes and expectations.

The fact that children do learn specific sex-role attitudes and behavior expectations at an early age has been well substantiated in the literature (Williams, et al., 1975; Schlossberg and Goodman, 1973; Beuf, 1974; Siegel, 1973; Swick and Carlton, 1974). Chasen (1974) reported that four and five-year-old boys and girls believed males were generally better than females in all areas about which they were questioned except in cooking ability where women were judged superior. Williams, et al. (1975) found kindergarten children clearly differentiated between acceptable expectations of adult male and female behavior along stereotypic dimensions. Occupational choices and aspirations cited by three to five-year-old children indicate boys at this age already have much broader and more varied career aspirations than girls (Schlossberg and Goodman, 1973; Beuf, 1974; Siegel, 1973; Swick and Carlton, 1974).

Although sex-role appropriate behavior and attitudes may be functional in some ways, rigid sex-role prescriptions are potentially harmful to

children. Maccoby (1966) concludes that optimal cognitive functioning depends on a balance between feminine-passive and masculine-active orientations and that extremely sex-role stereotyped persons are handicapped intellectually because:

- 1) extreme passivity interferes with concept formation and manipulation, and
- 2) extreme activity interferes with sustained and concentrated analysis.

Block (1973) found that greater maturity, as measured by Kohlberg's Moral Development Test and Loevinger's Sentence Completion method of measuring ego functioning, is accompanied by more androgynous, less sex-typed definition of self.

As a result of empirical information regarding sex-role stereotyping in young children's behaviors, attitudes and expectations and recent popular interest in the effect of rigid sex stereotypes by women's groups (Gersoni-Stavn, 1974), an increasing number of books for young children are being published which purport to offer "positive image" or "non-stereotyped" alternative role images for both males and females. Publishing companies are also beginning to revise guidelines for children's books with these new trends in mind. However, little attention has been focused on carefully examining the content of children's picture books themselves.

The general and specific sex-role related dimensions of picture books are communicated to children in two ways -- through the text and through the illustrations. Unlike books for readers in which illustrations function simply to supplement the text, by definition, picture books are those in which text and pictures serve dual and equally important roles in overall presentation of content (Huck and Kuhn, 1968). Often, the child's first

experience with a picture book is when it is read to him by an adult, but typically the child returns to the book and "reads" it himself later. He follows the story line by remembering what was read to him and matching this to the pictures, or visa versa. Consequently, in evaluating the potential effect of picture books on children's behaviors and attitudes, both the text and illustrations need to be acknowledged as playing a dual role in influencing the child.

Summary

It has been found that young children do form sex-role stereotyped attitudes and expectations (Chasen, 1974; Williams, et al., 1975; Beuf, 1974). Research also indicates that young children at the preschool level do experience books that contain character portrayals through both the text and illustrations, which may serve as models for their own behavioral actions, attitudes, and expectations (Weitzman, et al., 1972; Nilsen, 1971; Stewig and Higgs, 1973). Some empirical evidence exists that the formulation of rigid sex-role stereotypes can be dysfunctional (Maccoby, 1966; Block, 1973). This, along with popular questioning of rigid sex-role stereotypes, has led to changes in current publishing trends and greater awareness among the public regarding media portrayal of male and female roles. However, before the effects of picture books on children's sex-role behavior and attitudes can be assessed, picture books need to be systematically analyzed according to how they portray males and females in their texts and illustrations.

Review of Literature

Research in the area of sex-role stereotyping in children's picture books is not extensive, although some studies do exist. Stewig and Higgs (1973) contrasted women's and men's roles in picture books by selecting a random sample of 154 books from 957 picture books available in one university education library. The books represented a 68-year time span (1903-1971), 78 different authors, and both award and non-award winning books. The following variables were included in the analysis:

- 1) the number of men and women represented
- 2) their occupational roles
- 3) their non-professional or recreational roles.

The results of the study showed 78 percent of the books included males and females as characters. Of the books which did portray human characters, all but three books included men while all but thirteen included women. Men were shown in 58 different occupations, the most frequent being farmers, fishermen, and sailors. Few men were shown engaged in domestic duties. Women were portrayed in 16 different occupations, roughly one-fourth as many as the number for men. Eighty-three percent of the women were depicted as homemakers. The most frequent roles for the remaining 17 percent of the women were either that of nurse or teacher.

Stewig and Higgs concluded that occupational roles, especially for women, were highly stereotyped. They also noted that men's roles most often depicted in picture books while less restricted, did not realistically represent the most common occupational roles for men. Non-professional and recreational roles were also judged to be stereotyped. Men were portrayed

in active recreational pastimes while women were represented in sedentary recreational activities.

The Stewig and Higgs study did not report operational definitions for occupational, recreational or behavioral categories, nor was reliability on the instrument reported. Furthermore, it was unclear whether the reported occupational and recreational roles were tabulated on the basis of representations in either the illustrations or the text alone or in a combined analysis of the text and illustrations.

A replication of the Stewig and Higgs study was conducted by Stewig and Knipfel (1975) to determine whether picture books published in the recent years reflected current societal trends toward a wider variety of occupational roles for women. One hundred books were randomly selected from 503 picture books published between 1972 and 1974. The same instrument developed for the initial study was used.

Stewig and Knipfel did find some differences in the two samples. Women were represented in 78 percent of the newer books while only 65 percent of the books surveyed earlier contained representations of women. While women were still most frequently portrayed as homemakers, thirty-two percent (as opposed to 17 percent in the earlier study) were shown in roles other than homemaking. The variety of non-homemaking roles also increased. These included medical professions, musical professions, lawyers, and theatre, film, or television actresses.

Weitzman, Eiffer, Hokada, and Ross (1972) investigated the sex-role treatment of males and females in Caldecott Award winning books and runners-up from 1968 through 1971. The Caldecott Medal has long been viewed as the most prestigious award for children's picture books and these books

are usually found in public libraries, preschools, and on the lists of recommended books for young children. Weitzman, et. al. focused their study on three areas of analysis:

- 1) the number of males and females illustrated
- 2) the activities boys and girls were engaged in
- 3) the activities and personality characteristics of adult role models.

The results showed illustrations of males outnumbered those of women by a ratio of 11:1. Males were pictured 261 times in the books while females were illustrated only 23 times. Consequently, a much larger number of role models was shown for males.

The types of activities and behavior characteristics of boys and girls were also quite different. Boys were shown as active, independent, adventurous, and engaged in a much wider variety of activities than girls. Girls were portrayed as passive and immobile, and were often depicted in subservient relationships to the men and boys in the stories.

Adult men's and women's activities were found to be similarly stereotyped. Women were passive, domestic servants, and often depicted only in relation to the men in their lives rather than as independent, intelligent individuals. Men were active and engaged in a variety of activities, but were excluded from participation in childcare and home maintenance activities. Men were also depicted in many more occupational roles than women. Seventeen different roles, including storekeeper, king, fighter, fisherman, policeman, soldier, father, judge, and farmer were shown for men; while women's roles included wife, mother, fairy, fairy godmother, and underwater maiden.

Personality characteristics of men and women were also reported to be clearly differentiated according to the adult's sex. Males were found to be portrayed as active, assertive, clever, achieving, unemotional and aggressive, females were helpful, cooperative, nurturant, passive, fearful, dependent, and seeking to please and be attractive to men.

On the basis of their study, Weitzman et al. concluded that the characters in Caldecott Award books and runners-up serve to reinforce traditional sex-role attitudes and behaviors and present "unrealistic" role models for both male and female children. However, no operational definitions were reported for judging active or passive activities or for the behavior categories used. Likewise, no reliability for the instruments used in the analyses was reported.

Caldecott books were also examined by Nilsen (1971). Eighty Caldecott winners and runners-up from 1951-1971 were evaluated along the following dimensions:

- 1) number of male and female names used in book titles
- 2) number of males and females shown in illustrations
- 3) activities engaged in by males and/or females as portrayed through both the text and illustrations.

Nilsen reported 14 male names as opposed to four female names in the book titles and found males illustrated 579 times while women were shown in illustrations 386 times. Nilsen noted that representation of girls through illustrations actually decreased from 228 to 29 over the twenty year span she investigated.

In evaluating the activities of the males and females in the books, Nilsen found that women and girls were often onlookers rather than active participants in activities, performed a multitude of services for men

and engaged in what she labeled "unobtrusive" roles. Men and boys, in contrast, were shown traveling, engaged in active pursuits such as swimming and climbing, and explaining while girls listened.

Like previous studies, Nilsen reported no reliability on the instrument nor did she include operational definitions of categories used in the study.

An admittedly informal investigation of books for young children was conducted by Fisher (1970) to examine the stereotypic portrayal of boys and girls in picture books. Fisher found females appeared in only 20-30 percent of the books she examined in bookstores and libraries. On the basis of her informal survey, Fisher noted that "through books, boys' achievement drive is encouraged; girls' is cut off. Boys are brought up to express themselves; girls to please. The general image of the female ranges from dull to degrading to invisible " (p. 6).

Summary and Problem Statement

Research in the area of sex-role stereotyping in children's picture books is in short supply. Current studies suggest that males and females are stereotyped in picture books according to their occupational roles, recreational activities, activity levels, and personality characteristics. Several methodological problems recur in the literature which must be noted however. All studies reviewed contained neither operational definitions of variables nor reports of reliability on instruments used in analyses.

Several reliable instruments with operationally defined variables have been developed to evaluate elementary textbooks along sex-stereotyped dimensions. (See Appendix A.) However, since the composition and intended audience of textbooks differs from that of picture books, it is necessary to develop a well-defined, reliable, and valid instrument to assess sex-role stereotyping in children's picture books.

The purpose of this study was to construct an instrument that would:

- 1) meet the standard psychometric requirements of reliability and validity, and
- 2) systematically analyze the behavioral characteristics of males and females which are portrayed to young children through both the text and illustrations of picture books.

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

Studies of sex-role stereotyping in children's picture books indicate that males and females are portrayed in picture books along consistently stereotyped dimensions (Stewig and Higgs, 1973; Stewig and Knipfel, 1975; Weitzman, et. al., 1972; Nilsen, 1971; Fisher, 1970). However, the reliability of the measurement procedures used in these studies was not established or reported. Therefore, in order to accurately assess sex-role stereotyping in picture books, variables need to be identified and operationally defined, and the reliability of the resulting instrument has to be empirically determined. It is to this end that the present study is directed.

Parameters of the Study

Previous studies of sex-role stereotyping in children's picture books provided a variety of alternatives for the focal dimensions of the sex-role stereotyping scale. These included numbers of males and females in titles of books, number of males and females shown in illustrations and/or mentioned in texts, the occupational and recreational roles of men and women, and behavioral personality characteristics of males and females. Although each of these dimensions have merit in evaluating books, an instrument combining many or all of the dimensions listed would be unwieldy and limited as well.

The number of males and females in titles, illustrations, and text is important in terms of the quantity of models available to children, but

these variables do not address important issues related to the quality of those models. For instance, simply increasing the numbers of females in titles, texts, and illustrations within picture books would not serve to diminish the rigidity of the sex-role model if most females depicted exhibited passive, nurturant, supportive, and non-aggressive behaviors. Focusing only on the frequency of males and females, then, may not be a valid measure of stereotyping.

The use of occupational and recreational roles to assess sex-role stereotyping in children's picture books may also have some limitations. While the role labels of doctor, nurse, teacher, fireman, mother, etc. do identify potential adult roles for males and females and may therefore affect future personal expectations of children, the behavior of characters in the context of a particular role may be a crucial dimension in defining a role for a child. The role label is depicted through the behavior of characters and the impact of a given role on a child may be dependent on both the qualities of the character and the quantity, or **emphasis**, on sex-role behaviors.

The behavior exhibited by main characters through the text and illustrations, i.e., what male and female characters actually do in picture books, and in what ways these behaviors are different, provides the most direct and meaningful information regarding appropriate sex-role behavior to young children. Adult occupational and recreational roles are behaviorally defined in picture books. Therefore, the behavior exhibited by main characters through the text and illustrations served as the basis of analysis.

Behavioral Categories

The selection of behavioral categories for the instrument was based on sex-stereotyped behavioral dimensions noted in previous investigations of children's picture books. In addition, the following sources were also used to determine categories for inclusion:

- 1) children's demonstrated awareness of stereotyped behavioral characteristics of males and females
- 2) universal adult male and female stereotypes
- 3) variables investigated in studies of elementary textbooks
- 4) empirical evidence of behavioral differences displayed by children between the ages of three and six.

Awareness of sex-role stereotyped behavior characteristics has been demonstrated by preschool age children. Chasen (1974) reported four and five-year-old boys and girls believe males are better workers, stronger, and smarter than females. Furthermore, Williams, et. al. (1975) reported that kindergarten children viewed adult males as aggressive, strong, loud, adventurous, independent, dominant, and ambitious while adult females were viewed as appreciative, emotional, sophisticated, and soft-hearted.

Kagan (1964) reported universal male and female stereotypes depict males as aggressive, independent, and able to control and suppress strong emotion. In contrast, females were characterized as socially poised, friendly, non-aggressive, nurturant, and passive.

Several studies conducted on sex-role stereotyping in elementary school texts offered additional behavioral dimensions for analyses. Child et. al. (1946) conducted a descriptive study on sex-role stereotyping in third grade texts. Females were found to be portrayed as nurturant, affiliative, and avoiding harm. In contrast, males were shown as active, aggressive, achieving, and intelligent.

Frasher and Walker (1972) examined the stereotypic portrayal of males and females in 734 first grade readers and readiness books. Boys were found to be portrayed as active, independent, assertive, brave, persevering, and able to solve problems. In the same group of books girls were depicted as timid, dependent, passive, incompetent, easily discouraged, and in need of help and protection.

Basal readers were examined by Saario, Jacklin, and Tittle (1973) to determine stereotypic behavior characteristics of males and females. Boys were portrayed as more aggressive and physically exertive as well as displaying better problem-solving abilities than girls. Girls were more frequently conforming, engaging in fantasy, and making egocentric statements. Saario, et. al., also found adult behavior stereotyped according to sex. Men were portrayed as physically exertive, constructive, productive, and able to solve problems while women were shown as conforming, nurturant, and directive.

Behavioral differences displayed by young children also provide a source of behavioral categories for inclusion in a sex-role stereotyping scale. Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) compiled a comprehensive review of studies related to sex differences in young children. These studies investigated aspects of both social and intellectual performance including: task persistence, reasoning ability, general intellectual performance, impulsivity, creativity, curiosity and exploration, activity level, emotionality, dependence, independence, helping behavior, sharing behavior, aggression, competition, cooperation, dominance, compliance, conformity, imitation, and nurturance. Based on their examination of the research,

Maccoby and Jacklin concluded there were more similarities than differences in children. However, some consistent sex differences were found. Pre-school boys were found to display more curious, explorative, and aggressive behavior while preschool girls were more conforming and compliant to adult directions. In addition, boys seemed to exhibit a somewhat higher activity level than girls, who were found to be more emotional than boys in specific situations.

Examination of the previously cited dimensions used to assess sex-role stereotypes indicated a core of major variables which were consistently used in analyses, although labels for these variables and some aspects of their operational definitions varied somewhat. Twenty-five major variables were extrapolated from this review and labeled as follows: dependence, independence, cooperation, competition, directive, submissive, persistence, cessation, explorative, non-explorative, sharing, selfishness, creativity, imitative, nurturance, non-supportive, aggression, non-aggressive, intelligence, ignorance, emotional, unemotional, active, passive-active, and inactive. In order to achieve independent and mutually exclusive dimensions the twenty-five categories were grouped into eleven bi-polar pairs and one group of three variables (active, passive-active, and inactive). Since the text and illustrations function together to present a unified behavioral model of a given character, it was necessary to select specific behavioral dimensions that could be analyzed in both the text and illustrations. Parallel definitions were developed for text and illustration behavioral categories.

Operational Definitions for Behavioral Categories: Text

One bi-polar dimension that was frequently cited in the literature was dependence-independence. Typically, dependence was attributed to females while males were characterized as independent (Frasher and Walker, 1972; Weitzman, et. al. , 1972). The distinguishing characteristic between the two dimensions is reliance on self vs reliance on another.

Dependence: (Dep)

Behavior which is directed at relying on another for emotional or physical support. Exhibited by:

- 1) Verbal requests for assistance in a task or situation, material aid, protection, or reassurance, and statements in the text which refer to these behaviors.
- 2) Statements in the text which refer to nonverbal behavior such as seeking close physical proximity through: being carried by another; hugging another; sitting on another's lap; holding on to another; or hiding behind another.
- 3) Statements in the text which refer to clinging to another for support, reassurance, or protection or statements which include requests for help in a situation or task.

NOTE: In the preceding definition "another" refers only to humans, personified animals, or inanimate objects.

Independence: (Ind)

Behavior which is directed at self-reliance or self-sufficiency. Exhibited by:

- 1) Verbal statements indicating the desire to do something by one's self ("I want to paint by myself," "I'll do it alone", etc.)
- 2) Verbal statements indicating a task was completed by one's own self.
- 3) Verbal resistance to an implied or explicit authority.
- 4) Statements in the text which refer to the following:
 - a) nonverbal self-reliant behavior (self-care skills of dressing, washing hands, brushing teeth, etc.)

- b) nonverbal resistance to an implied or explicit authority (disobedience, ignoring, or defiance of the authority).
- c) nonverbal behavior indicating someone is involved in a task by oneself without the physical assistance of another or is engaged in a task that differs from the tasks of the others around him.
- d) making decisions by oneself.

Another often cited bi-polar dimension is that of competition-cooperation. Females in picture books were portrayed as cooperative (Weitzman, et. al., 1972) while boys are usually more competitive (Maccoby and Jacklin, 1974). The crucial factor in this dimension is whether characters work together or against each other in the completion of a task, activity, or goal.

Cooperation: (Coop)

Behavior involving two or more persons or animals who work together in the same activity: a division of labor is apparent in which the efforts of one are supplemented by another. Exhibited by:

- 1) Verbalizations such as "We can finish this together," or "Let's work together," etc.
- 2) Statements in the text referring to nonverbal behavior such as one person bringing the paint while another brings the brushes, one person cooking food while another sets the table, etc.

Competition: (Comp)

Behavior involving two or more persons or animals which is directed at striving against another for some goal. Exhibited by:

- 1) Verbal statements revealing the need or desire to be first, best, the winner, etc.
- 2) Playing a competitive game where there is usually a winner. Competitive games include: tag; races; basketball; football; baseball; track; card playing; table games; hide and seek; drop the handkerchief; king on the mountain; ring-around-the rose; Easter egg hunts; and similar games.
- 3) Competing in a task to be the best or the first.
- 4) Statements in the text which refer to the above behaviors.

A directive-submissive bi-polar dimension was also included in the scale. Saario, et. al. (1973) reported females portrayed as conforming to the directions of another, while Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) report empirical evidence that preschool girls were more conforming than boys. Williams, et. al. (1975) found kindergarten children stereotyped males as dominant. The distinction between directive and submissive behavior is whether a character controls another or is controlled by another.

Directive: (Dir)

Behavior which guides, leads, controls, or directs the behavior of another and may or may not be used to achieve a desired personal ambition. Exhibited by:

- 1) Verbally directing how to do something, ordering another to do something, or stopping the behavior of another.
- 2) Verbally controlling or manipulating others to achieve a desired goal or to fulfill personal needs.
- 3) Statements in the text which refer to showing another how to do something, or to leading, guiding, or controlling another.
- 4) Statements in the text which refer to #1 or #2.

Submissive: (Sub)

Behavior which is compliant to another's direction or control. Exhibited by:

- 1) Verbal statements of compliance, obedience, or deference to the commands or wishes of another.
- 2) Statements in the text which refer to nonverbal behavior suggesting compliance such as: obeying commands, performing duties when asked or ordered to, or yielding to the directions of another.

Persistence-cessation, another dimension by which males and females are stereotyped in children's books, was included in the scale. Frasher and Walker (1972) report that boys are commonly portrayed as persevering while girls give up more easily. In constructing the operational definition