Focusing on the topic of sex stereotypes in children's literature, this annotated bibliography contains references of 28 articles and papers in the ERIC database. The citations include articles discussing sex stereotypes in children's reading materials, basals, picture books, content area materials, and award-winning children's books. Other sections include articles on teacher influence in reading material selection, and the effects of sex stereotypes on children. (MM)
Sex Stereotypes in Children's Literature

by Mary Morgan

Sex stereotypes are perpetuated in a variety of ways. Research indicates that sex stereotyping in children's literature has a major influence on the development of children's attitudes concerning sex roles, self-concept, and sexual identity. And although many publishers now employ guidelines for the elimination of sex-role stereotypes, especially in textbooks and other reading materials, studies show that stereotypes still flourish in children's literature.

This ERIC FAST Bib explores several aspects of sex stereotyping in children's literature. Following an overview of the issue, three sections cover research on sex stereotypes in different types of children's literature. The first of these sections examines elementary school reading materials, focusing on stereotyping in basal and picture books. The next section deals with sex stereotypes in content area reading materials—science books, counting books, and music education materials. Yet another category provides information concerning sex stereotyping in award-winning children's literature, including the Caldecott and Newbery Medal winners. Articles from this section not only examine the sex stereotypes in specific children's books, but also analyze how sex stereotyping has changed over the years. Teacher influence is the focus of the fourth section, and articles here indicate that teachers tend to choose materials which perpetuate stereotypical male/female roles. Finally, the effects on children of sex stereotyping in reading materials are discussed, focusing on the aspects of recall, reading comprehension, and behavior.

Abstracts for some of the articles cited here have been abbreviated to conform to the FAST Bib format. The ED numbers for sources included in Resources in Education have been included to enable the user to go directly to microfiche collections, to order from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS), or to go to RIE for the full abstract on those sources not available through EDRS. Reproduction services are also available from University Microfilms International (UMI) and from the Original Article Tarsheet Service (OATS) of the Institute for Scientific Information.

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Overview


Argues that publishers need to do more to eradicate racism and sexism from basal reading texts. Suggests including the handicapped, the elderly, and one-parent families in the texts would also reflect society more realistically.


Reports a study of sex-role distribution in children's literature, hypothesizing that today's writing for preschool children reflects the change in women's work roles by presenting more females in central roles, illustrations, and titles.


Reviews literature on children's acquisition of sex-typed knowledge, preference, and behavior and offers a matrix of sex-typing constructs and sex-typed content areas. Discusses the importance of activities, interests, and peer associations in the early acquisition of sex-typing constructs, as well as the importance of cognition and concepts about sex typing in the process of learning about gender.


Just as schools can teach consumerism and active criticism of unfair advertising techniques, so too can schools teach a watchdog attitude toward prejudice through the use of multicultural reading materials in libraries and classrooms.

Sex Stereotypes in Children's Reading Materials, Basals, and Picture Books


Reviews research dealing with two major questions: 1) Is sexism present in reading materials? and 2) Are boys' poorer readers than girls, and should teaching materials be geared to boys' interests?


Analysis of sex and race representation in almost 3,000 stories from 77 basal readers in 7 series published between 1980 and 1982 shows that, although minority and female numerical representation has increased, there has been little progress in role models offered.
Sex Stereotypes in Award-Winning Children's Books


Examines Caldecott winners and Honor Books of the 1980s and compares the findings to those of earlier studies to discover if the depiction of sex roles and characteristics has changed. Concludes that the newer books reflect a shift toward sex equality and provide some changing sex characteristics and roles—but not enough.


Examines the number of times male and female characters appear in text and illustrations, and evaluates the occupations and activities of the characters found in 14 Caldecott Medal winning children's books from 1971 to 1984. Finds that male and female characters continue to be shown in unequal numbers.


Shows how Caldecott and Newbery Medal books have reflected the changing norms of society during the past two decades, specifically in the increased number of books with women as main characters, positive images of females, and situations similar to those encountered in everyday life.


Analyzes Caldecott Medal and Newbery Medal books (1977 through 1984) for sexism. Provides guidelines used to determine sexism in the books.


Examines sex-role stereotyping in 44 Caldecott Award winning books published between 1957 and 1980. Reveals 7 major categories of sex stereotyping: 1) achievements of females are attributed to their good looks; 2) norms are established that limit female aspirations and self-concept; 3) males perform all brave and important deeds; 4) females most frequently show strong emotion; 5) females are stereotyped in domestic roles; 6) males sit idly by while females perform domestic occupations; and 7) only males are depicted in a variety of occupations.

Teacher Influence


Shows that, despite discussions of sexist stereotyping in children's literature, student teachers wrote stories containing those stereotypes. Concludes that student teachers need to be made aware of the influence of male-dominated language and of male versions of experience on themselves, their students, and the literature available for classroom use.

Reports on a study intended to discover the criteria for selecting children’s literature and textbooks. Concludes that the teachers’ choices were sexist because selected plot conflicts were resolved through male agency.


Describes observations of two British primary school classrooms and how teaching conditions foster or preclude gender-specific reading attitudes.


Surveys teachers in Texas and Kansas to determine their favorite books for reading aloud to children. Shows that their preferences included twice as many male protagonists as female and that these males were portrayed more positively than the females.

**Effects of Sex Stereotypes on Children**


Following exposure to picture books that showed characters playing with either sex-role-stereotypic or nonstereotypic toys, preschoolers chose to play longer with the toys they had seen in the books. The books had a greater effect on girls than on boys.

Gardiner, Sandra Faye Altman. Children’s Sex Role Preferences and Their Like-Dislike Ratings and Comprehension of Sex-Stereotyped Reading Content. University of Saskatchewan, Saskatchewan, Canada, 1983. 205 pp. [ED 236 569]

Examines the effects of sex-typed content and sex-role preference on the reading material preferences of fifth grade boys and girls. Explores how high-and low-rated sex-typed reading content and students’ gender and sex-role preferences influenced reading comprehension.


Of four stories, preschool girls liked one with a female character and feminine activity best, and one with a male character and masculine activity least. The reverse was true for boys. Measures taken a day later showed that children recalled more about stories they had liked last the day before.


A study of 172 students in 4th, 7th, and 11th grades sought to determine 1) the impact of male main characters and story interest; 2) the impact of traditional and nontraditional stories on reading comprehension; and 3) the effect of age on sex-role attitudes, story interest, and reading comprehension.