

**ENCULTURATING GENDER: EXAMINING BESTSELLING CHILDREN'S
PICTURE BOOKS**

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ABSTRACT

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This research examines gender depictions in 20 current bestselling children's picture books. I argue that children's picture books, specifically those aimed at children 0-5 years of age, portray gender in a way that potentially limits girls in developing and achieving their goals because of the limited options presented to them based on gender and also constrains boys' emotional growth due to the rigid standards depicted for them. These depictions are especially critical during the Sensorimotor and Preoperational stages in children's development because they are developmentally primed for acquiring and being socialized to gender knowledge. Extending the work of Hamilton et al., this research reaffirms their findings, showing that nearly a decade later, in terms of gender depictions in children's picture books, little progress has been made. Females are still largely underrepresented in central roles and in illustrations, are passive, and are presented with limited options in terms of occupations, while males are portrayed as active and independent and have a variety of occupational choices available to them. Additionally, this study employs a contemporary visual rhetorical lens to further enrich our understanding of the gender depictions in children's picture books by analyzing illustrations in terms of McCloud's definitions of the relationships between text and images and Horn's notions of proximity, white space, placement, distance, and angle. This portion of the analysis reinforces the findings and allows for a more articulated discussion of gender depictions in children's picture books.

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DEDICATION

To my daughters, Charlotte and Madilyn. May this serve as proof that you can accomplish great things in spite of the challenges that life will send your way. All my love.

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PROLOGUE

As the mother of a precocious toddler, I can't help but notice how she interacts with her growing collection of books. We read together daily and she clearly enjoys her alone time with the books, pointing to the illustrations, flipping the pages and babbling to herself as though she is reading them. At 18 months, she already has her favorites, pulling them from the shelf, running toward me with an enormous grin and usually a screech of excitement anticipating yet another reading of the book. Like most preschoolers, she likes to have the same stories read over and over again. Her exuberance and the frequency of readings started me on the path for this inquiry. As we read, I wondered how much of the stories she understood, how the messages were affecting her, and started looking more closely at the messages they contained. As an educated parent and feminist, what stood out to me was the way some of her books rely heavily on gender stereotypes, even when those stereotypes are not necessary for the story. I wondered if other parents were concerned about the way gender is depicted in their children's books. I felt an imperative to seek out a deeper understanding, thus this inquiry began. This paper is a step toward addressing some of these concerns, and my hope is that other scholars and parents find it informative and useful.

INTRODUCTION

Nearly 20 years ago, in her popular article, “Hers; The Smurfette Principle,” Katha Pollitt claims that “the message is clear. Boys are the norm, girls the variation; boys are central, girls peripheral; boys are individuals, girls types. Boys define the group, its story and its code of values. Girls exist only in relation to boys” (Pollitt). Her inquiry into children’s television programming, and others (Weitzman et al. 1972; Hamilton et al. 2001) who have examined children’s picture books, have found Pollitt’s assertion to be accurate. These results, reproduced repeatedly over time, are disheartening for parents of both boys and girls because of the potential for harm they cause to the child’s developing understanding of gender roles, norms and expectations in our culture. The portrayals of gender in these popular media have the potential to not only limit girls in developing and achieving their goals because of the narrow options presented to them based on gender, but also constrain boys’ emotional growth because of the rigid standards portrayed for males. It would be a disservice to future generations to ignore the way gender depictions influence children, the way children are socialized to gender roles, especially at a time when they are developmentally prime for acquiring “knowledge about gender ... as well as about the behaviors, activities, and characteristics that are deemed appropriate for each gender in their society” as Julie Eichstedt explains in her article about conventional and metaphorical gender stereotypes (296).

In order to understand how children are socialized to gender roles, we must first understand how their brains develop. Piaget’s theory of cognitive development helps us to see how human cognitive development occurs in stages. In the Sensorimotor stage, the first of four stages, children progress from an egocentric view of the world, which is focused

around meeting their basic needs and coming to an understanding of their surroundings through the use of their senses and the process of assimilating new information into existing schemas, to a sociocentric view, characterized by the onset of prelogic as shown through connections between the signifier and signified known as the symbolic function, and insight as influenced by social interactions beyond the basic senses (Piaget 276-8).

While egocentrism extends into other stages with varying degrees of influence, the influence of the child's social surroundings are prevalent in that children begin to mimic behaviors of those around them and understand their actions as acceptable or not based on the reactions of their caregivers. Additionally, by the end of the Sensorimotor stage (approximately age 2), through the continued process of assimilation and accommodation, children are capable of developing long lasting schemes, or mental representations of patterns in order to understand their surroundings (Piaget 286). In terms of gender socialization, evidence of scheme development is seen in a 2 year old's ability to identify typical roles for girls and boys in storybooks, television shows and in the relationships of the people that surround them. At this stage, they are also able to identify socially appropriate clothing for girls and boys, both real and inanimate (dolls, action figures, etc) (Patt 3).

The second stage of development, described by Piaget as the Preoperational stage, lasts from age 2 through about age 7 and is of critical importance to this study. Hallmarks of this stage include play, imitation, role playing and language development. Children's performance in this stage is largely influenced by socially constructed knowledge, as shown through role playing of social situations, the use of objects as symbols (creative play) and the internalization of social norms through extensive knowledge questioning

(when children question their surroundings because they've come to understand they have vast amounts of knowledge but don't know where it came from) (Piaget 288-290). As language develops in this stage, children, while still egocentric, can use language to verbally represent objects and concepts, but they aren't able to think logically or apply a perspective other than their own (Piaget 290). Socially constructed knowledge is influential here because children absorb and mimic cues from their surroundings.

To better understand the interplay between gender, language development and children's picture books, we can look to A.C. Huston's 1983 *Handbook of Child Psychology* as cited in an examination of gendered pronoun use in preschool reading corners by Patt and McBride. The *Handbook* explains that children learn "through observation and direct instruction that persons, things and concepts can be classified as masculine or feminine" (Patt 3). Language, like that in children's first exposure to its written form, influences the way children see the world around them (LeFevre 105). Language becomes a "vehicle of thought," according to Ernst Cassirer, and developmentally, "thinking becomes linguistic," according to Lev Vygotsky (LeFevre 104). In *Invention as a Social Act*, Karen Burke LeFevre discusses what she says is a "dynamic view of invention, [seeing it as] the creation of something new," and asserts the ongoing need to examine language (like that in children's books, I would argue), "for its inventional role in transforming world views into argument" (LeFevre 7). Because form and content are inseparable for language, language becomes epistemic, a way of knowing (LeFevre 106). Picture books read to and by children provide both an opportunity for observation as well as some direct instruction about the gender norms of their culture. Jean Piaget, as discussed in LeFevre, asserts that children learn logic not through the acquisition

of individual words, but through imitation and performance (LeFevre 102). Thus, children's logical development of gender norms is based on their imitation of the scenarios they encounter, many of which come in the form of characters and situations developed in picture books. The authority of parents and other adult figures in the child's life in the choice of books read, along with the child's perception of the illustrations lend themselves to the child's ability to observe representations of gender in their picture books. Further, direct instruction on appropriate gender roles can come in the form of the reader's own gender biases when discussing the reading and illustrations with the child. All of this is compounded when children request the same books be read to them again and again. The repetitiveness of this reading, combined with children's development of logic through imitation, makes the gender depictions in their books a viable source of social cues to children about the gender based roles available to them.

Evidence of these influences can be seen in children, as early as 18 months old, who have shown an understanding of metaphorical connections between objects and gender, especially for male gendered objects, according to a study by Julie A. Eichstedt. Her study used a violation of expectancy technique to determine whether infants aged 18-24 months were able to make connections between gender and metaphorical images, like a heart and the color pink associated with females and a bear and angry faces attributed to males (298). Her results showed that even children at this age possess knowledge of gender stereotypes, and revealed a greater emerging knowledge of male gender stereotypes over female (307). The participants in her study showed greater surprise to see males violating gender stereotypes than females, which she claims may be due to changes in the way contemporary roles for women are more flexible than the rigid expectations for men (307).

Eichstedt also relates a 2001 study she collaborated on, showing that by 18 months, girls were aware of the gendering of toys, “associating dolls with girls and vehicles with boys (297). A later collaborative effort (2002) showed 2 year olds consistently pairing items and activities by their stereotypical gender association, like “a suit, a shirt and tie, shaving and fixing cars with males, and dresses, putting on makeup, cooking and vacuuming with females” (297). Clearly, the research shows that about midway through the Preoperational stage (by age 5) children are already exhibiting awareness of gender roles and stereotypes. Children’s picture books have been and continue to be a medium by which these expectations are communicated from one generation to the next.

Historically, examinations of children’s books have revealed significant information about a culture’s views on and definitions of masculinity and femininity. Children’s literature in the early to mid 19th century examined generic childhood themes and family values. Basic expectations of both genders were similar, therefore not much variation in gender roles was noticeable. In her examination of gender role stereotypes in children’s books, Narahara describes how the messages tended to be the same, reflecting traditional values and serving as socializing tools. From 1875 through the end of the 19th century, children’s books began to reveal gender specific stories, reflecting expectations for boys to play active roles and take on leadership positions and girls to seek a life of “obedience and humility” (5-6). The concept of boys acting and doing and girls simply being emerged during these years and became ingrained over the next 50-60 years in children’s books, to include picture books. As Weitzman, Eifler, Hokada and Ross clearly explain, “because books for young children explicitly articulate the prevailing cultural values, they are an especially useful indicator of societal norms” (1126).

Since the emergence of movements for women's equality, scholars and critics began to notice the proliferation of gender stereotypes embedded in children's books. Major studies, (Weitzman et al., 1972, Collins, 1984, Heintz 1987, Albers, 1996, Gooden, 2001, Hamilton et al., 2006) including those that examined award winning and prestigious books series like the Caldecott and Newbery book awards, revealed a tendency for boy characters to be positively represented as central characters with higher status in occupations and authority roles, more independence and more active functions than girls. While many publishers were eager to take steps toward gender equity, even developing guidelines in the hopes of eliminating gender bias, little was done with children's picture books. The focus was placed more on children's literature and popular books for older children. Only in the last decade of the 20th century did critics begin to realize the importance of examining children's picture books (Narahara 7). If children form rigid notions of socially acceptable gender roles by the age of five, and picture books play a role in enculturating these values, then there was a need to closely examine the gender biased messages picture books were communicating.

Picture books appeal to children both through text and images. Books send "clear messages to children about how society works" (Kelley 33). Children are able to make connections between the story and the pictures, learning about their own identities through their reactions to character's expressed emotions as seen in images depicting body language and facial expressions (Narahara 8). While the earlier research, like the studies of award winning books, showed that girls are significantly underrepresented in central roles or with characters having any status or authority, the findings fail to point out the impact on boys emotional lives as set by these same standards and models. For both genders, inequity

in representation through characters in books can leave them with an inability to identify with themes and characters, making them invisible and lacking proper role models. Young children look to characters of the same gender as models. Research has shown that characters in books, to include picture books, tend to be gendered in stereotypical ways, communicating false ideals and values about the capabilities of young children, limiting them through the boundaries of gendered culture norms (Singh 2-3). Some, like Ellen Seiter, as quoted in *Convergence Culture* by Henry Jenkins, claim that readers are free to connect with characters of another gender. She remarks that crossing this divide, however, is not easily done, especially for children at such a young age who are constantly battered with what society deems to be socially appropriate gender behaviors (184).

In “Sex-Role Socialization in Picture Books for Preschool Children,” Lenore Weitzman, Deborah Eifler, Elizabeth Hokada and Catherine Ross found that women were underrepresented in prize-winning picture books, and that when women were represented, it was in stereotypical ways. They assert that “through books, children learn about the world outside of their immediate environment” and that “books provide children with role models – images of what they can and should be like when they grow up” (1126). Further, all of this is reinforced through the repetitious nature of the reading of picture books at an age when children are developing their own identities in terms of gender.

In their update to Weitzman’s 1972 study, Mykol C. Hamilton, David Anderson, Michelle Broaddus and Kate Young found that in nearly 3 decades, not much had changed in terms of the representation of women and girls in children’s picture books, even when using a much broader sample. In their article, they briefly reviewed the work of other scholars in the field since the Weitzman study and explain that while some claim

improvements in the 80's and 90's in the representation of female characters, males still dominated 2:1 (758). They list several consequences of this underrepresentation and stereotypical portrayal, “[they] contribute negatively to children’s development, limit their career aspirations, frame their attitudes about their future roles as parents, and even influence their personality characteristics” (757).

Though the studies by Weitzman et al. and Hamilton et al., among others (Fisher 1976; Nilsen 1978; Collins et al. 1984, Dougherty & Engel 1987; and Tognoli et al. 1994) are informative in regards to the state of gender representation in children’s books over the past 40 years, this study focuses on bestselling children’s picture books because there is little research that limits the data to these bestsellers, the books we can be sure are purchased and are in children’s homes. As mentioned above, prior research has focused on lists of award winning books because of the prestige and power granted to award winners. Other research has examined children’s literature, geared toward older children, which says little about the connections to socialization and enculturation of the models available to children during the crucial stages of development as discussed above. Others have focused on popular or the most recommended books at various levels, but none have limited their samples to the books we know are in children’s homes. I’ve chosen to work with bestselling children’s picture books, with a focus on 0-5 years old, because these books can be considered in terms of their influence in socializing gender norms in children when they are most susceptible to this socialization based on their cognitive development and because bestsellers are the books actually purchased. These bestselling books actually make it into the homes of children, which can’t necessarily be said for the award winners or other categories previously examined. Because little to no research is available that specifically

looks at best-selling children's picture books and the gender roles they model for children during the formative years in which they would likely read and interact with these books, this study seems necessary then, to fill this void in the research.

Additionally, none of the studies mentioned consider the specific impact of visual language on the ways that children interpret the text and illustrations in their books. Readers are guided through illustrations and printed text based on the way the visual elements are organized. There are relationships between the text and illustrations in children's picture books, much like the comics analyzed by Scott McCloud in his book *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*. As McCloud asserts, "as children, we show and tell interchangeably, words and images, combining to transmit a connected series of ideas" (152). Analysis of the relationship between text and illustrations in terms of gender in children's picture books, then, is valuable because doing so allows us to understand the interconnectedness of the ideas these books are transmitting to children. McCloud's work contributes not only the language needed to describe these relationships, but also a way to understand the readers level of connection to the illustrations through his notions of icons, symbols and universality. Using scales based on the level of complexity of illustrations, McCloud's work allows for an understanding of the subjectivity of the reader, claiming that the simpler the illustration the more universally representative it becomes, allowing readers to place themselves within the text (27-36). This is especially important when considering the depictions of gender in children's picture books. If children are driven by visual elements to "inhabit" the story, we need to come to an understanding of exactly what they are inhabiting.

Robert Horn further advances our understanding of the way visual elements impact our understanding of texts in his book *Visual Language: Global Communication for the 21st Century*. He discusses how the use of space has an emotional impact on the reader and is important in understanding how readers interpret power. Horn explains how placement, distance, angle, white space, and proximity, among other concepts, influence how text and illustrations are interpreted by readers. An example of this is how readers attribute value to images in the foreground of an illustration over images in the background. Application of these concepts may enrich our understanding of how gender is depicted in best-selling children's picture books in a way that previous studies have not.

The Current Study

With this study, I examine how gender is depicted in current bestselling children's picture books. In order to effectively describe gender in these books, I address four specific questions, originally developed by Weitzman but clearly articulated in Hamilton's study. First, do the texts favor males over females in the numbers of title characters, main characters and illustrations? Next, is there a relationship between the sex of the author and that of the main or title characters? Then, are males and females depicted in stereotypical ways, with girls and women appearing mostly indoors and portrayed as passive and nurturing while boys and men are mostly outdoors and portrayed as active, assertive and in the role of rescuer? And finally, what are the occupations of male and female characters? And, in addition to the questions that have guided earlier research on the topic, I ask how applying the lens of contemporary visual rhetoricians to the analysis of the texts helps to enrich our understanding of the way gender is currently depicted in bestselling picture books?

This study, which serves as both an update and an extension to the existing research is a valuable addition to the academic conversation about gender in children's picture books. With nearly a decade between this study and the Hamilton et al. study, my hope is that the bestselling children's picture books that I examine will reflect the cultural changes (ones surrounding issues of gender, that is) that have occurred in the past ten years and that these methods will serve to illuminate the way gender is depicted currently.

METHODS

An examination of picture books with these questions in mind can potentially provide scholars, parents, and educators with a more complete picture of the way gender is currently depicted and the information about gender expectations of our western society that are communicated to young children when these books are read to and by them. The current study seeks to extend earlier research with a more focused sample and add the contemporary visual analysis element to the conversation.

In “Gender Stereotyping and Under-representation of Female Characters in 200 Popular Children’s Picture Books: A Twenty-first Century Update,” Mykol C. Hamilton, David Anderson, Michelle Broaddus and Kate Young designed their study to “assess gender bias in 200 top-selling children’s picture books” (759). In order to do this, they pose 6 hypotheses, based on Weitzman’s 1972 study. As previously quoted, they describe their sample as “top-selling children’s picture books,” but it actually includes popular books, bestsellers, recommended books and award winners. They coded their sample by counting the number of occurrences of variables directly related to their hypotheses. Multiple coders were supplied lists of stereotypical representations of gender. For example, coders were supplied lists of stereotypical occupations for male and females.

I’ve chosen to extend some elements of their study, specifically to reexamine 4 of their 6 hypotheses, but I will look at the data set to describe the way gender is depicted, not necessarily to assess gender bias. My data set, based on current best-sellers for the Spring of 2010, is also more focused. The larger data set in their study was comprised of not only the best-selling children’s picture books from 2001, but also included recommended and popular children’s picture books and award winning picture books. This combination of

award winners, best-sellers and recommended books made sense for the scope of their study, but is not necessary to replicate for mine as the added books provided them an opportunity to make comparisons (for their hypotheses 5 & 6) which I have chosen not to examine in this study.

Hamilton, Anderson, Broaddus and Young mined 200 children's picture books in 2001 in order to test 6 hypotheses, the first 4 of which are retested for this study based on more current information. The first focuses on the idea that there would be fewer female characters, whether child, adult, main character or title character in text and illustrations. Their second point examined if there was a relationship between the author's sex and that of the title and main characters. Their third hypothesis examined ideas about females and the domestic sphere and males in the social sphere. They looked at the data set to see how many females and males were portrayed indoors, outdoors, passive, active, being rescued, rescuing, and being assertive or aggressive. I also re-examine their final hypothesis that looks at occupations of female and male characters in terms of gender traditional and non-traditional occupations, or lack thereof (Hamilton et al. 759).

Like Hamilton et al., along with 3 additional coders, I've coded my sample by counting the occurrences of 42 inventory items, related to the 4 hypotheses I'm testing (see appendix A). Also like Hamilton et al., my coders and I defined title characters as characters referred to in the title of the book or characters that appeared on its cover. Characters were counted as main characters if the text referred to them specifically. We defined child characters as appearing to be under the age of 18, and adults as over the age of 18. To note, there were no questionable instances of age. To determine females and males throughout, much like Hamilton et al., we discussed common understandings of their

representations and applied these standards when gender was not specifically defined in either text or illustration. Characteristics like clothing, hair, facial features, makeup, stance and body language were used to define a character as either male or female in the absence of more specific information. Like the previous study, representations of gender neutral characters or illustrations were not counted for any of the defined categories.

Like Hamilton et al., we did not gender animals unless there were direct cues, like gendered articles of clothing and use of makeup, in the text or image to indicate their gender. An exception to this was the gendering of cats as female and dogs as males in the absence of other gender cues, as earlier research as explained by Weitzman, has shown a propensity for participants to gender cats as female and dogs as male when gender is not specified (1129). The original article by Hamilton et al. did not define the terms active, aggressive, assertive, rescue or nurture. In the absence of this information, we determined a character to be portrayed as active when the character was engaged in sustained motion (playing, running, jumping, digging, etc), and passivity was defined by the lack of sustained motion (sitting, lying down, watching others, listening, etc). We defined assertive and aggressive behavior as any behavior that was decisive, demanding or forceful in the actions displayed or discussed in the text by or about a character. Rescue scenes were determined to be scenes in which one character performs an action that saves another. We defined nurturing as behavior that ensured the well-being of another character. An example of this would be hugging, kissing, tucking in to bed, rocking, holding, washing and feeding.

As defined by Hamilton et al., traditional occupations were defined as typical occupations attributed to a specific gender, of which stereotypical categories have persisted over time, despite the fact that people of either gender currently work in a wide variety of

jobs outside of these stereotypical categories. Traditional occupations for women include nursing, teaching, and motherhood. Traditional occupations for men include policeman, fireman, mailman, doctor, and lawyer. Fatherhood was not considered as a traditional occupation for male characters as men are commonly viewed as working outside of the home in addition to their roles as father.

Rather than testing for inter-rater reliability, as time and resources were limited, I chose to aim for a consistent reading of the texts. To do so, I provided training for coders regarding the definitions of the terms mentioned in each prompt as described above. We discussed examples thoroughly. Each coder examined 5 books. When a questionable instance arose, the other coders would pass the text to me for coding. Since there exists a limited amount of subjectivity in terms of individual understanding of gender in general, I designed this process so that any subjective decisions were mine to make. By utilizing this process, I was able to achieve a standard of consistency in the absence of inter-rater reliability testing.

In addition to describing the sample in terms of the depictions and categories described above, I add the visual analysis elements defined by Horn and McCloud in order to further interpret gender. I apply the analysis to four books, a subset of the sample. The books chosen for the subset are seemingly progressive, based on the data from the study. I apply McCloud's definitions of the relationships between text and illustrations, along with Horn's concepts of placement, distance, angle, white space, and proximity to further interpret and explore depictions of gender in the subset of the sample.

The categories, broken down into the 42 prompts mentioned above, allow me to address the 4 hypotheses tested in this study. Discussion of prompts (see appendix A) 5-16

address the first hypothesis regarding the frequency of representations of genders in the texts. Prompts 4-8 address the second hypothesis, which examines if a relationship exists between sex of the author and that of the title and main characters. Prompts 17-34 breakdown what the third hypothesis refers to as portrayals of females as nurturers in the domestic sphere, through placement indoors, portrayals as nurturers, passive behaviors and positioning as being rescued. These prompts also examine the depiction of men in the social sphere, as more active, assertive or aggressive, shown outdoors and in the role of rescuer. The final prompts, 35-42, address the fourth hypothesis in terms of the occupations depicted for males and females. The additional focus on visual analysis addresses the final element of this inquiry, using Horn and McCloud's concepts as a new lens to interpret the picture books.

Overall, the methods I've designed for this inquiry are designed to illuminate the specific information necessary to provide a clear description of the current depiction of gender in children's picture books. Extending the methods of earlier research in the field, re-testing some of the related hypotheses, and adding a new lens to the interpretation of gender in current bestselling children's picture books not only allows me to discuss the findings in terms of what has come before, but also to add the visual analysis element to an important discussion about gender enculturation.

Data Set

I developed a document set of 20 bestselling children's picture books for children under 5 years of age. I've determined the data set by averaging the ranking of each book found on Amazon.com, Barnes & Noble (both the 0-2 years old and 3-5 years old lists), Borders, Publishers Weekly and The New York Times bestsellers lists. As discussed in the

literature review section of this proposal, I've chosen to work with bestselling children's picture books because we can know with some certainty that they end up in children's homes, unlike award winning books that may win awards but not end up in the hands of consumers. I've also chosen to focus on children's picture books that are intended for children ages 0-5 because, as discussed in the literature review section, by age 5 children are socialized to gender roles. I've also chosen to work with bestselling lists that are available on the internet so that the validity of my study can be verified with easily accessible archives by anyone with access to the internet.

Lego Star Wars: The Visual Dictionary, ranked on both the Publishers Weekly and The New York Times lists, was removed because it is intended for children age 7 and up. Those two lists, while popular sources of information on bestselling books, do not differentiate age groups for children. Their lists simply specify "children" as a category. Also, *Treasure Island* was removed because it falls in the literature category, and is not a picture book. It was ranked number one on Amazon.com's list, but is likely there due to a limitation I will discuss later in this section. These were the only two books removed from consideration for analysis in this study because they do not fit within the age or category guidelines I've determined.

The books, selected by average ranking and listed in order from 1-20, that are analyzed in this study are:

1. *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle
2. *Goodnight Moon* by Margaret Wise Brown
3. *On The Night You Were Born* by Nancy Tillman
4. *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See* by Bill Martin Jr.

5. *The Lion & The Mouse* by Jerry Pinkney
6. *Love You Forever* by Robert Munsch
7. *Fancy Nancy and the Late, Late, Late Night* by Jane O'Connor
8. *Daddy Kisses* by Anne Gutman and Georg Hallensleben
9. *Waddle* by Rufus Butler Seder
10. *Mommy Hugs* by Anne Gutman and Georg Hallensleben
11. *First 100 Words* by priddy books
12. *The Sandwich Swap* by Her Majesty Queen Rania Al Abdullah
13. *Gallop* by Rufus Butler Seder
14. *The Quiet Book* by Deborah Underwood
15. *Moo, Baa, La La La* by Sandra Boynton
16. *Guess How Much I Love You* by Sam McBratney
17. *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak
18. *Cat* by Matthew Van Fleet
19. *Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus* by Mo Willems
20. *Just Grandma and Me* by Mercer Mayer

Limitations of the Sample

I've identified two limitations with this data set. First, booksellers websites, like Amazon.com, Barnes & Noble and Borders, do not make archive data of their bestsellers for any given time period available. I was hoping to have an entire year of data to average, but short of collecting a weekly listing over the next year (which simply doesn't work with my time frame of completion for this project), I have no way to gather a year of data. The data set is based off the average current ranking, which can potentially be influenced by

recent holidays or trends. The second potential limitation is human error. I've worked for one of the booksellers in the past, and have insider knowledge as to how products get "tagged" or categorized. Lists, like bestsellers in a category, are formulated based on items sold that are "tagged" as belonging to that category. If an item is tagged incorrectly, but is still a high volume product, it will be listed as a result on the list the consumer queries. For instance, Amazon.com's results when I queried bestselling children's picture books for ages baby through 3 years of age listed *Treasure Island*, *Merry Adventure of Robin Hood*, *Beauty and the Beast* and *Celtic Tales, Told to Children* as the top 4 bestselling books in the category, but upon further inspection, none of the top 4 results should have been tagged as belonging to the category baby through 3 years of age. Amazon includes a link on the page for consumers to report problems like this and they are quick to react when this type of problem is identified, but that doesn't help my cause. This type of error is why I chose to average several lists. I think averaging 6 lists makes my data set more reliable and less prone to the effects of human error (hence none of the 4 books mentioned above ended up in the top 20 for selection in my data set).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In order to extend the work of Hamilton et al., I have examined their first four hypotheses. For the first hypothesis, their study found that male characters were represented more often than female characters in title and main roles. In terms of the relationship between the sex of the author and the sex of the characters portrayed in the central roles, they found that “male authors accounted for a greater number of male than female title characters and main characters” (761). Hamilton et al. also found that female characters were more frequently represented with passive behaviors, depicted indoors, and in nurturing roles, however their study did not show a significant difference in the representation of male and female characters in active roles (761). In terms of occupations, Hamilton et al. found that female characters were more frequently shown in gender traditional occupations (761). Like Hamilton et al., I have presented my findings divided by each hypothesis I examined. After relating the findings and comparing my results to theirs, I have included some discussion regarding what the findings show about gender depictions in the current bestselling children’s picture books.

Hypothesis 1

The first hypothesis states that there are fewer female than male characters in title roles, as central characters and present in illustrations. An interesting finding for this hypothesis is that the actual total number of males depicted in all 20 books is fewer than the total number of females for 4 of the 5 measures. Upon further investigation, I found that when females do appear in books, they tended to appear in groups or in larger numbers overall than the males. Four books, in particular, tended to skew the results because of the way the numbers of females proliferate in these books. Because of this effect, these are the

titles that are examined later in the study as a subset, using the visual analysis. They are *On The Night You Were Born*, *Fancy Nancy and the Late, Late, Late Night*, *The Sandwich Swap* and *The Quiet Book*. For example, 10 out of 20 books have more males than females in the illustrations, but there are 400 females illustrated in total and 311 males. This is because there are 79 females in illustrations in *Fancy Nancy* and 76 in *The Sandwich Swap* with less than half of those numbers represented for males in the illustrations. *The Quiet Book* has 7 females in the illustrations but no males, and *On The Night You Were Born* has 17 females illustrated and only 2 males, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Number of Characters in Illustrations by Gender

Title	# of Female Occurrences	# of Male Occurrences	Total Occurrences
The Very Hungry Caterpillar	0	7	7
Goodnight Moon	29	46	75
On the Night You Were Born	17	2	19
Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What do You See	7	4	11
The Lion & The Mouse	39	23	62
Love You Forever	8	18	26
Fancy Nancy and the Late, Late, Late Night	79	28	107
Daddy Kisses	0	8	8
Waddle	0	0	0
Mommy Hugs	8	0	8
First 100 Words	17	38	55
The Sandwich Swap	76	30	106
Gallop	0	0	0
The Quiet Book	7	0	7
Moo, Baa, La La La	7	10	17
Guess How Much I Love You	0	54	54
Where The Wild Things Are	0	20	20
Cat	97	6	103
Don't Let The Pigeon Drive The Bus	0	5	5
Just Grandma and Me	9	12	21
Total	400	311	711

Also, in *The Quiet Book*, the only gendered characters were adult females and the illustrations portrayed only females and non-gendered characters. This is particularly disturbing in terms of gender expectations because women are already supposed to be the

quiet, well-behaved ones. This book seems to use females to model the desired quiet behavior or subtly (or not so subtly) say that females need to be even quieter. When compared to *Where the Wild Things Are*, the gender inequity in *The Quiet Book* is highlighted even further. *Where the Wild Things Are* portrays no female characters in title or central roles at all, and there are no females in the illustrations.

This comparison seems to illustrate the social ideal that women and girls be “quiet” while men and boys can be “wild.” While the mother in *Where the Wild Things Are* is mentioned in the book, she is never shown. In this instance, the female is not only quiet, she is invisible. Overall, this tendency to have excessive numbers of females portrayed when females are present at all skews how one might understand the findings. When this is accounted for, it becomes evident that these bestselling children’s picture books still portray males more frequently than females in central ways. Additionally, it highlights the idea of male singularity while reinforcing the concept articulated by Katha Pollitt that “boys are individuals, girls types” (Pollitt).

Overall, my results are similar to the Hamilton study in that more books portray male characters more frequently than female characters in main roles, in illustrations and as child characters. Seven out of 20 books show more male main characters than female, while 5 out of 20 books have more females than males. Only 4 of the 20 books lacked any indication of gender in the main characters, and the remaining 4 books had equal numbers of male and female main characters. Half of the sample portrayed more males than females in the illustrations. Seven books out of 20 show more male children than female children. Equal numbers of books (5 books out of 20, each) exhibit males and females as title

characters. However, more books have more adult females than adult males as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Frequency of Representation by Gender in Titles and as Main Characters

Title	# of Females in Title	# of Males in Title	# of Female Main Characters	# of Male Main Characters
The Very Hungry Caterpillar	0	1	0	1
Goodnight Moon	0	0	4	5
On the Night You Were Born	0	0	18	2
Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What do You See	0	0	1	0
The Lion & The Mouse	1	1	1	1
Love You Forever	0	1	1	1
Fancy Nancy and the Late, Late, Late Night	1	0	1	1
Daddy Kisses	0	1	0	8
Waddle	0	0	0	0
Mommy Hugs	1	0	7	0
First 100 Words	0	0	0	0
The Sandwich Swap	2	0	3	0
Gallop	0	0	0	0
The Quiet Book	0	0	0	0
Moo, Baa, La La La	1	0	3	5
Guess How Much I Love You	0	2	0	2
Where The Wild Things Are	0	2	0	1
Cat	3	0	75	6
Don't Let The Pigeon Drive The Bus	0	0	0	1
Just Grandma and Me	1	1	1	1
Total	10	9	115	35

In nearly four decades of study, little has changed in terms of the frequency with which female and male characters are portrayed, especially those that hold valued positions in the books. Children's books still grant males the title and main character roles more frequently than they do for females. Plenty of options are available for boys, which may give them an underlying sense of entitlement. This is detrimental to young girls perusing books on the racks because they are unlikely to find books that they can connect to in terms of gender, and as Weitzman et al. discuss, children "are bound to receive the impression that girls are not very important because no one has bothered to write books about them"

(1129). Though subtle, the message is pervasive; girls are not valued enough in society to hold the valued roles in the books they read.

Hypothesis 2

The second hypothesis states that male and female authors portray male characters more frequently than female characters in the title and central roles. First, it is worth noting that more than half of the books in the sample were authored by men. Out of the 11 books authored by men, 5 of those books had more male characters than female characters in title or main roles. 2 of those 11 books had more female characters in central roles. Another 2 had equal representations of males and females as title or main characters and 2 did not display gender at all in the central roles.

Out of 6 books authored by women, 3 had more females in title or main roles and 2 had more males than females as title or main characters. The four books mentioned earlier, as potentially skewing some of the data by including large groupings of female characters to appear more progressive in terms of female representations, *On The Night You Were Born*, *Fancy Nancy and the Late, Late, Late Night*, *The Sandwich Swap* and *The Quiet Book*, were all authored by women. Based on this sample, it would appear that some of the successful women authors have a tendency to compensate for the traditional underrepresentation of female characters by choosing to place female characters in greater quantities, in central roles and illustrations, in their books. Hamilton et al. claimed that their similar findings for female authors to place females in central roles was an improvement over earlier research, like that done by Weitzman et al., however they fail to account for the way that female authors, as shown in my sample, over-represent female characters when

they choose to represent them at all (763). My findings are similar to what Hamilton et al. found.

Overall, my results for the hypothesis stating that male and female authors portray male characters more frequently than female characters in the title and central roles echoes those from the earlier study by Hamilton. There are more male authors portraying male characters more frequently than female characters than there are female authors depicting female characters, largely due to the fact that nearly twice as many of the bestselling books are authored by men. As with the first hypothesis, total numbers of characters are skewed by the 4 books written by women that situate girls in large groups, increasing the numbers of females in title and main roles. For example, for male authors, there are a total of 9 male characters in title or main roles and 4 females in title or main roles, but for female authors, there are 29 females depicted in title or main roles versus only 13 males. In the end, the hypothesis is still confirmed based on the number of books written by male authors that depict males in title or central roles more frequently than female authors do for their same gender. Men dominate in this category as well, with male authors outnumbering female authors, while both sexes write books that favor male characters in central roles. Male author's overwhelming success in the industry as compared to females seems worth further investigation in a separate study. Although we might think that more women than men are writing children's books, the books that make the bestsellers lists, an important measure of success in the field, are written by men.

One difference from earlier research comes by way of the 4 female authors mentioned that wrote books with female characters in central roles, but did so in a way that still reinforces gender stereotypes by depicting girls in groups rather than independently,

the way boys are often depicted in texts. An example of this occurs in *On The Night You Were Born*, a male character (possibly the father) stands alone in a field, while the ladybugs are shown as a large group. These images are problematic both because one would hope the father would be with the child on the night that child was born, but also because a single ladybug in the illustration would be just as effective as showing them as a group. This illustration then seems to reinforce gender stereotypes of girls and women lacking the ability, strength or power to inhabit a space by themselves, while it is expected of boys and men. Further, setting up an expectation for singularity in boys can constrain their emotional growth. As related by Weitzman et al., “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” (1125). Boys, therefore, are valued in different ways than girls, and expected to be “active and achieving while girls are passive and emotional” (1125). Boys or girls are constrained by these expectations and are likely to feel different or weird if they don’t meet society’s expectations for their gender.

Hypothesis 3

The third hypothesis states that female characters are portrayed indoors more often than outdoors, are portrayed in passive roles, depicted as nurturers, and are more likely to be rescued than act as rescuer. Male characters are more frequently portrayed outdoors, are more active, assertive and aggressive than female characters, and are depicted in the role of rescuer.

Female characters are overwhelmingly portrayed as more passive, more nurturing and more likely to appear indoors while male characters were depicted as more active, more assertive and/or aggressive, more likely to be the recipient of nurturing and more

likely to appear outdoors. The numbers all seem to reinforce stereotypical depictions for appropriate gender roles and expected behaviors. As shown in a study by C. Schau and K. Scott in 1984, as described by Hamilton et al., there is a “consistent tendency for sexist materials to strengthen children’s biases” (757). Gender bias, like that found in this sample, “gives boys a sense of entitlement and lowers girls’ self-esteem and occupational aspirations” (758). And, as Pollitt states:

The sexism in preschool culture deforms both boys and girls. Little girls learn to split their consciousness, filtering their dreams and ambitions through boy characters while admiring the clothes of the princess. The more privileged and daring can dream of becoming exceptional women in a man's world -- Smurfettes. The others are being taught to accept the more usual fate, which is to be a passenger car drawn through life by a masculine train engine. Boys, who are rarely confronted with stories in which males play only minor roles, learn a simpler lesson: girls just don't matter much.(1)

Similar to what Hamilton et al. found, in 7 of the 20 books, females were depicted as more passive than males, with 284 total representations of passive female characters and 152 representations of passive male characters. While 11 of the 20 books did not clearly depict whether characters were inside or outside, 5 of the remaining 9 books depicted females indoors more often than males with 140 representations of females indoors, versus 104 males. 8 out of 20 books depicted females in the role of nurturer more often than males, with 34 instances of female characters nurturing another character and 26 instances of male characters in the nurturer role. Not surprisingly, the male characters were the recipients of the nurturing more often, which serves to emphasize the service role common

to stereotypical gender roles for women. Women serve men more frequently than the reverse. The numbers, as shown in Table 3, seem to reinforce stereotypical notions of women's place. Apparently, even nearly a decade after Hamilton's study, girls and women are depicted more frequently as quiet, passive, and indoors where they can better nurture and serve their male counterparts.

Table 3: Characters Represented in Passive and Active Roles by Gender

Title	Occurrences of Passive Females	Occurrences of Passive Males	Occurrences of Active Females	Occurrences of Active Males
The Very Hungry Caterpillar	0	2	0	11
Goodnight Moon	18	45	2	11
On the Night You Were Born	16	2	1	0
Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What do You See	0	0	6	4
The Lion & The Mouse	18	11	19	14
Love You Forever	2	8	6	10
Fancy Nancy and the Late, Late, Late Night	75	25	4	3
Daddy Kisses	0	0	0	7
Waddle	0	0	0	0
Mommy Hugs	0	0	7	0
First 100 Words	1	1	1	7
The Sandwich Swap	59	15	17	12
Gallop	0	0	0	0
The Quiet Book	2	0	5	0
Moo, Baa, La La La	0	0	3	5
Guess How Much I Love You	0	27	0	26
Where The Wild Things Are	0	4	0	16
Cat	82	6	11	0
Don't Let The Pigeon Drive The Bus	1	1	0	2
Just Grandma and Me	10	5	4	13
Total	284	152	86	141

Half of the sample depicts male characters as more active than female characters, with 141 occurrences of active males to 86 of active females. Male characters are shown outdoors more than females. There were a total of 146 occurrences of male characters outside versus 132 of female characters outdoors. Males were also more aggressive than females in the books, with 19 depictions of male characters behaving in an assertive or

aggressive manner and 10 of female characters behaving that way. On a positive note, 14 of the 20 books, to include the top 4 books in the sample, did not have any portrayals of assertive or aggressive behavior by either gender. At least young children can find a reprieve in their picture books from the aggression and violence so prevalent in other aspects of our culture.

As with the first two hypotheses, my results for the third hypothesis, stating that female characters are portrayed indoors more often than outdoors, are portrayed in passive roles, depicted as nurturers, and are more likely to be rescued than act as rescuer and that male characters are more frequently portrayed outdoors, are more active, assertive and aggressive than female characters, and are depicted in the role of rescuer reinforce those found in the Hamilton study, with the exception of the rescue measure. In all 20 of the books in the sample, rescue scenes only occurred twice, once in *The Lion and the Mouse*, and once in *Grandma & Me*. Each time, it was a female character rescuing a male character. Neither depiction is very heroic, at least not in the sense of what most people would consider in terms of rescue. In *The Lion and the Mouse*, the mouse frees the lion from his tangle and in *Grandma & Me*, grandma saves her grandson from the claws of a friendly looking crab. While my findings are similar to Hamilton et al., it is important to note that my study shows male characters are represented more frequently in active roles and female characters more frequently in passive roles.

Hypothesis 4

The fourth hypothesis states that male characters are more likely to be shown in a wider variety of occupations as compared to female characters, which are more likely to be depicted in gender traditional occupations. Nine out of 20 books in the sample show males

and females in traditional occupations, only 1 portrayed a gender non-traditional occupation. *Daddy Kisses* portrayed the father as only a father, lacking any discernable cues that he worked outside of the home. As explained previously, we considered fatherhood a non-traditional occupation for male characters, as men are stereotypically portrayed as working outside of the home as their primary job. In the sample, females were depicted with gender traditional occupations 16 times. Not surprisingly, all but two of these instances were representations of motherhood. The two non-mother occupations illustrated were that of elementary school teacher and school nurse, both stereotypically gender traditional occupations for females. There were 5 depictions of males with traditional occupations. This confirms the final hypothesis that, male characters are more likely to be shown in a wider variety of occupations as compared to female characters, who are more likely to be depicted in gender traditional occupations. Based on the sample of bestselling children's picture books, girls can expect to have extremely limited options (motherhood), while boys can expect the opportunity to work in a variety of jobs outside of the home. Weitzman et al. assert that "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!" (1144). Meanwhile this expectation for boys seems to enable instead of constrain them. However, it has the potential to become an expectation *of* them, not simply opportunities they can expect to be available to them. When framed as an expectation of them, the variety of jobs outside the home that are depicted as available to males and not females becomes a constraint when a male wants to stay at home instead of finding employment outside of it. Fatherhood is simply not enough for a man, he is expected to do more. A man wanting nothing more, then, is a failure.

VISUAL ANALYSIS OF A SUBSET

To further describe the way gender is depicted in children's picture books, I applied the lens of contemporary visual rhetoricians, Scott McCloud and Robert Horn, to a subset of the sample. I chose to focus this analysis on *On The Night You Were Born*, *Fancy Nancy and the Late, Late, Late Night*, *The Sandwich Swap* and *The Quiet Book* because these books were responsible for the potential skewing (in favor of female character representations) the data previously described. Looking first at the relationships between text and illustrations in each book and then examining a few of the illustrations in each book in terms of placement, distance, angle, white space, and proximity, I hope to uncover how the books still reinforce gender stereotypes even though, at first glance, they seem to attempt to subvert them.

A logical first step toward a visual analysis of these books is to examine the relationship of the text to the illustrations. Scott McCloud defines seven categories to describe this relationship. Each category is based on the notion that both the text and the illustrations tell a story, but they differ in the extent to which the text and illustration tell the same story, support or deviate from one another. Word specific combinations occur when the pictures simply illustrate the text without adding anything to it. Picture specific combinations rely on illustrations to tell the story with words adding little to the tale. A duo-specific relationship exists when the words and pictures, together, send the same message. An additive relationship is depicted when either the words or the illustrations amplify or elaborate on the message sent by the other. A parallel relationship exists when the text and the pictures communicate separate messages without intersecting. A montage

occurs when pictures are the main communicator of the message, but words exist as part of the illustration. The final category, the interdependent relationship, exists when the illustrations and text work together to convey a message neither could do on its own (152-5).

On the Night You Were Born, *The Quiet Book*, and *The Sandwich Swap* are examples of the additive relationship, where the images amplify the message in the text. Interestingly, the message elaborated on in all three cases can be discussed in terms of gender. In *On The Night You Were Born*, an image of a farmer standing in his field at night adds to the textual description of the news of the child's birth sailing over the land in a whisper. The farmer is not specifically referred to in the text. Some readers may interpret his presence as reinforcing the fact that the land depicted is, in fact, a farm, others may think that he is the father of the child. Regardless, his presence in the illustration reinforces the stereotypical notion of a man's ability to be independent, especially when compared to a later illustration of ladybugs, decidedly feminine, where 16 of them appear together in the illustration watched over by a very male looking toad. A comparison of these illustrations reinforces this stereotype subtly, by depicting the man on his own, but the female ladybugs in a large group, protected by the male toad. Interestingly, in nature, the toad would be a predator to the ladybugs. Instead of protecting them, as this illustration seems to depict, he'd be much more likely to eat them. Girls, then, can't function independently and need the constant protection of a boy, even when they are in groups with other girls, and they should be wary of their protectors because the same male figure protecting them might very well be the predator they should fear. Additionally, as explained by Weitzman et al., females are defined, then, by their relation to the males in their lives who are more

frequently situated in more socially valuable roles (1136). In *The Quiet Book*, the illustrations elaborate on the text by providing images of what each quiet scene should look like. Of note, being “invisible quiet” is depicted as a child character waiting for a female nurse to administer a shot. Moments requiring a child to be “invisible quiet” are varied, but this book chose to depict a gender stereotype to communicate that message. The same thing happens again when the child character is “thinking of a good reason you were drawing on the wall quiet”. This scene could just have easily depicted a child at home with the silhouette of a parent in the distance, but instead, a stereotypical female teacher is sternly carting the child off to the principal’s office. In *The Sandwich Swap*, Lily and Salma are described as being “best friends at school,” but the picture is of two girls leaning on a tree, with no school in sight, holding each other’s hand. This illustration depicts stereotypical behaviors of girls as Lily and Salma are being passive, leaning on a tree, and nurturing one another through hand holding, when this picture could have easily shown the girls actively playing during recess at school. The elaborations in all three books that show the additive relationship between text and illustrations contribute to the stereotypical expectations and roles assigned to males and females.

To add to the visual analysis of these books, we can turn to illustrations in each book, focusing on the concepts of placement, distance, angle, white space, and proximity in each that Robert Horn claims are critical to understanding how readers are guided through the text and to their understanding of which elements are valued above others. According to Horn, placement in the frame (foreground and background), distance between objects, the angle objects are placed at within the frame, the white space between objects in the frame and the proximity of objects to one another can help readers understand which objects are

more important, and therefore hold more power, in the frame (Horn 111, 135, 143, 185-90, 229-30). Applying this lens to illustrations in children's picture books for this study can help readers to understand, then, what elements within the illustrations are more important in terms of gender. Horn's concepts of visual language help to illuminate, in more detail, how gender is depicted in the books.

In *On The Night You Were Born*, not a single illustration depicts a female character by herself. In one frame, the ladybugs are in close proximity to one another, and the silhouette of the woman in the field is throwing her arms up toward the sky, drawing the reader's attention directly to the flock of geese flying into the scene above her. According to Horn's concepts of visual language, in terms of proximity, placement and angle, the reader understands that the geese, which show no signs of gender, have more value than the woman as they are placed above her. The man standing in the farm field shares the frame with an owl and the moon, and while the man is not alone, each character is situated separately, with distance (blank space) between each of them, so they clearly stand on their own, independent of the others in the frame. In yet another illustration, a mother duck and her ducklings are gathered together with the male gendered moon situated above them at an angle that indicates the moon is looking down on them in a protective manner. Even though the moon is not specifically gendered, it functions as protector to the family as a whole. The mother duck is just that then, a mother apparently in need of protection from an outside entity. And furthermore, she again can't stand alone in the frame, is placed in close proximity to her ducklings, insinuating that she exists solely to function in the role of mother and is underneath, and therefore, according to Horn, subordinate to the non-gendered figure of the moon in the frame.

Similar situations occur in the story of *Fancy Nancy and the Late, Late, Late Night*.

The story begins with Nancy visiting her neighbor, Mrs. DeVine. The accompanying image shows Mrs. DeVine and Nancy sitting at a table, sipping tea. The illustration is situated at an angle which forces the reader's eye to move from the top, left corner to the bottom right. Along that line, the reader encounters two love-birds, in a cage that towers over the characters in the frame, followed by a cluster of female characters sitting passively at a table, drinking tea, their heads all cocked toward one another. The love birds, situated at a higher position in the frame along the linear line that guides the reader through the illustration, seem to place value in terms of coupling and this is reinforced throughout the image with depictions of multiple females (Mrs. DeVine, Nancy, and her female Papillon puppy) clustered together in a passive way, indoors and leaning in toward each other, and throughout the book, because the love birds reappear frequently in positions of value and attention throughout the illustrations in the book. When the reader turns the page, they are confronted by another image of the female characters, lounging passively in a living room and looking through scrapbooks. The female characters are placed in close proximity to one another, angled in a way that shows they are engaged with each other and not acting independently. Towering over them are old Hollywood wall posters, all depicting men and women together, but the men's faces are all larger and positioned more centrally than the women in the frame. Additionally, Mrs. DeVine is pointing to a scrapbook picture of a man, her finger positioned at an angle that draws the reader's attention to the male face, and if the reader continues to look along this line, they will encounter two photos on the coffee table, one of a man by himself and another of a male dog, the picture is curled upward, positioned over and as if it were kissing Nancy's (female) puppy who happens to

be sitting on the table. The large images of the men in the wall posters are clearly placed above the female characters in the frame, giving the reader a sense that males in decorative wall posters are more powerful and important than the female characters in the story.

In *The Quiet Book*, like *On The Night You Were Born* and *Fancy Nancy and the Late, Late, Late Night*, the concepts of placement, distance, angle, white space, and proximity highlight the way the illustrations in these books perpetuate gender stereotypes. Each illustration in this book portrays the type of quiet mentioned on the page. The illustration that accompanies “What Flashlight? Quiet” in *The Quiet Book* is particularly interesting in terms of white space, proximity and size. There are two male child characters sitting in the dark, and though they are children, they appear larger than the two female characters that are situated slightly above them in the upper left hand corner. The two male characters have space between them, so that while they are sitting together, these male characters still appear independent of one another while the two female characters are in close proximity to one another (and strangely one appears to be playing a piano placed in the hallway of the home) dressed in stereotypical female attire (one is in an apron, the other wearing a dress and pearls, while the male characters are not shown wearing any clothing) and the only light in the frame is shown on them, effectively highlighting their roles as mothers in the frame. Another illustration of a barbershop is also particularly interesting because the only female character in the scene is a mother and is situated in close proximity to her male child, who appears to be trying to leap out of her lap. There is very little space between the two, while the male barber and the male child client have considerable distance between the two, appearing independent of one another. Also worth mentioning in this illustration is the fact that the only female character is depicted in a passive position,

seemingly helpless to control her active male child and the other two male characters are much larger in the illustration and positioned in the foreground, giving them more value in the readers mind because they are placed in front of, or closer to the reader, in the illustration.

The illustrations in *The Sandwich Swap* also perpetuate gender stereotypes as shown through a visual analysis of placement, distance, angle, white space, and proximity. A lunchroom scene in *The Sandwich Swap* repeats much of what I have described in the other three books. The lunch tables are situated at an angle so that one side is above the other. The majority of male characters in the illustration are sitting on the side of the table that rises above the rest of the image. Each boy has blank space between him and the character situated next to him. The female characters are positioned beneath them, in a subordinate role and in closer proximity to and facing other characters. This once again, according to Horn, subtly reinforces the gender stereotypes that position males as capable of independence, while females rely on the presence of other characters. Also, the males in the image are behaving in an active, boisterous manner, while the girls seem to sit passively, eating and talking with other characters.

In terms of McCloud's ideas about the relationships between text and illustrations and Horn's concepts of placement, distance, angle, white space, and proximity, applying the lens of contemporary visual rhetoricians to the illustrations in bestselling children's picture books can help to illuminate the ways these books perpetuate gender stereotypes. The visual analysis aspect does a great deal to enrich our understanding of gender depictions in the books in a way that simply counting occurrences of male and female characters in various ways cannot. Parents and scholars looking to continue researching in

this vein should consider applying the contemporary visual analysis lens of McCloud and Horn to more illustrations and more books in order to further develop our knowledge of the way gender is depicted in children's picture books.

CONCLUSIONS

Extending the prior research combined with the application of a new lens to bestselling children's picture books has certainly illuminated the ways that gender is depicted in the books and one of the ways that gender stereotypes are perpetuated. At a crucial stage in children's development, when they are forming ideas about expected and acceptable behavior for each gender, the books they are exposed to send them stereotypical messages, setting them up to inhabit these roles instead of challenge them. While this study has some limitations, it has brought to my attention several areas where the research can, and hopefully will, be extended and developed further. I will discuss both the limitations and potential areas for future research and also highlight 3 important findings; the tendency to over-represent female characters by female authors by grouping females together, the singularity of male characters and the value of applying a contemporary visual analysis to the illustrations in children's picture books. I think that these three findings will be most valuable to parents who seek a deeper understanding of how gender is depicted in the books they read to their children and to scholars seeking to replicate or extend on this study in the future.

Limitations

Looking over the methods employed for this inquiry, the most important limitation to note is the issue of inter-rater reliability. A different approach would have allowed for raters to code a subset of the sample, or for all 4 raters to code the entire sample and submit their findings for reliability testing. Though I am confident in the results of this study because of the way I established consistency in the coding, I think it would be interesting to

see if allowing the time and resources needed for reliability testing would produce the same or similar results.

Another limitation I have identified is that I have employed descriptive statistics, counting occurrences in each book to show how gender is depicted. Previous studies, like Hamilton et al., used much larger samples, and therefore could use predictive statistics. I made the decision to use a smaller sample because Weitzman et al. used only 18 books in their sample and because I wanted this study to focus on current bestsellers, and not incorporate data from recommended and award winning book lists. That said, a larger sample, for instance, the bestsellers for an entire year, or 100 bestselling books instead of the top 20 would allow me to employ predictive statistics, instead of simply describing gender depictions based on the occurrences of each coding prompt.

A final limitation worth considering, that is connected to the size of the data set, as mentioned above, is that the books that made the top 20 list are based on current bestsellers for the Spring of 2010. There is a possibility that certain books may sell more over a holiday season, in this case Easter and Mother's Day. Some of the books in this top 20 might not appear on the bestsellers list when data is averaged over a year instead of just one season. Collecting data on bestsellers for the period of a year will help to account for this limitation, but would obviously take more time and resources than were available for this study.

Further Research

Accounting for these limitations, future research might focus on comparisons of books in the sample. A comparative analysis of *Mommy Hugs* and *Daddy Kisses*, focusing on the visual analysis element of this study would illuminate even more of the gender

inequity present in these children's picture books than is shown in this study. A comparative study of *The Quiet Book* and *Where the Wild Things Are* might also illustrate more clearly the expectations for each gender in terms of activity and domestic versus social spheres and further illuminate the idea of the invisible woman discussed by Weitzman et al. Additionally, a more complete study focusing only on female authors and their tendency to inflate the numbers of female characters might reveal whether or not this is a new trend, and what it does to enable or constrain gender norms and expectations about girls and women. It is also worth noting that this study's use of Hamilton's hypotheses inherently focuses the results on the existing stereotypes for genders and does not allow for lengthy discussion about progress. A different study design, perhaps one less focused on numbers and description and more focused on a rhetorical analysis would illuminate more progressive, positive results.

Important Findings

Contrary to what I'd hoped for at the onset of this study, current bestselling children's picture books are still under-representing female characters in central ways, and are still limiting in their portrayals of socially acceptable roles and norms for each gender. Adult and child, male and female characters are still represented in stereotypical ways, even though the roles women and girls, men and boys fulfill in reality today are significantly more varied. This study reaffirms the results of those that have come before it. Girls and women are still very much linked to the domestic sphere, appearing mostly indoors, expected to fill their one and only purpose of motherhood, and exhibiting passive, nurturing behaviors, while boys and men are expected to be more active, are free to roam outside of the domestic space and have considerably more options available to them in

terms of career choices. For them, fatherhood is an afterthought. Parents and scholars who want to work toward challenging these stereotypical representations might find it useful to focus on 3 of the most important findings from this study; the way more than half of the female authors represented in this sample group female characters together in large numbers, the way male characters are depicted independently of other characters (unlike the female characters), and Horn & McCloud's concepts of placement, proximity, angle, and blank space as a way to understand how different elements in illustrations are valued in children's picture books.

This study has shown that some of the successful female authors have a tendency to group female characters together in large numbers, rather than portray them independently the way male characters are. This grouping of females reinforces stereotypes and makes it seem as if there has been a great deal of change in terms of gender depictions, particularly the under-representation of female characters in central roles. As previously discussed, when this grouping of female characters is accounted for, we still see that female characters are depicted fewer times than male characters, overall, in title roles and as main characters. This is detrimental to young readers because they identify with the characters in the central roles. Under-representation of female characters leaves young female readers with fewer characters to identify with and young male readers with a sense of entitlement associated with and enculturated as a norm for their gender.

Another important finding is that this study has shown that while female characters are frequently depicted in groups, male characters are portrayed independently. This, too, speaks to a gender stereotype that boys and men are more capable of acting independently than girls and women. Frequent depictions of the singular male character not only works to

reinforce the idea that females are types and must rely on others for support and that males can strike out in the world on their own, but also adds to this gendered expectation of singularity for males, which, like with the findings about male characters being depicted more often than female characters in central roles, reinforces a sense of entitlement in young boys.

A final important aspect of this study I would like to highlight is the way looking at the illustrations and text through the lens of contemporary visual rhetoricians has enriched our understanding of how gender is depicted. We can better understand how stereotypes are reinforced, in specific yet subtle ways, by discussing the relationship between the text and illustrations and considering the concepts of placement, proximity, angle, and blank space in those illustrations. These concepts have allowed us to visualize how illustrations grant power to certain elements and not others by the way the images are situated in the frame and how they are connected to the text. We gain a deeper understanding of gender depictions in children's picture books by considering how we inherently "read" illustrations and process the information in them. Through the visual analysis process we can better understand and discuss gender depictions and the ways that stereotypes are reinforced.

Children's books have historically reflected the values and expectations of the culture they exist within. Sadly the values and expectations embedded in this sample shows that these books have not kept pace with the actual changes we've witnessed in our culture. In fact, they are nearly half a century behind. As a feminist and the mother and stepmother to young girls, I want to recognize the role of stereotypes in our culture and raise my daughters to understand that stereotypes, particularly gendered ones, can and should be challenged. My daughters are individuals, not types. Reading together is part of our regular

routine, and it saddens me to see that picture books we have read together are perpetuating the very stereotypes that I hope they'll challenge. Based on these findings, I think it is important that parents of young children pay closer attention to the messages about gender embedded in their books, and make an effort to discuss with children how their actual behaviors are similar and/or different to the characters they read about. Doing so seems like a reasonable first step in overcoming the potential impact to children during these formative years that the stereotypical depictions of gender, abundant in their picture books, may have.

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APPENDIX A

Inventory Items for Coding

1. Title
2. Year of Publication
3. Author
4. Author sex
5. Number of female title characters
6. Number of male title characters
7. Number of female main characters
8. Number of male main characters
9. Number of characters overall
10. Number of female child characters
11. Number of female adult characters
12. Number of male child characters
13. Number of male adult characters
14. Number of females in illustrations
15. Number of males in illustrations
16. Total number of illustrations
17. How often male characters are portrayed as active
18. How often female characters are portrayed as active
19. How often male characters are portrayed as assertive or aggressive
20. How often female characters are portrayed as assertive or aggressive
21. How often male characters are portrayed as passive

22. How often female characters are portrayed as passive
23. Number of males indoors
24. Number of males outdoors
25. Number of females indoors
26. Number of females outdoors
27. Number of males that were rescued by another character
28. Number of females that were rescued by another character
29. Number of males rescuing another character
30. Number of females rescuing another character
31. Number of males nurturing another character
32. Number of females nurturing another character
33. Number of males being nurtured by another character
34. Number of females being nurtured by another character
35. Number of males with male-traditional occupations
36. Number of males with non-male-traditional occupations
37. Number of females with female-traditional occupations
38. Number of females with non-female-traditional occupations
39. Number of males with gender neutral occupations
40. Number of males with no occupations
41. Number of females with gender neutral occupations
42. Number of females with no occupation

APPENDIX B

Data Tables Relevant to Hypothesis 1

Title	<i>The Very Hungry Caterpillar</i>	<i>Goodnight Moon</i>	<i>On The Night You Were Born</i>	<i>Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See</i>	<i>The Lion & The Mouse</i>	<i>Love You Forever</i>
Numbers of female title characters	0	0	0	0	1	0
Numbers of male title characters	1	0	0	0	1	1
Numbers of female main characters	0	4	18	1	1	1
Numbers of male main characters	1	5	2	0	1	1
Number of characters overall	1	9	41	19	5	3
Number of female child characters	0	2	0	5	0	1
Number of female adult characters	0	2	2	1	1	1
Number of male child characters	1	5	0	4	0	3
Number of male adult characters	1	0	1	0	4	1
Numbers of females in illustrations	0	29	17	7	39	8
Numbers of males in illustrations	7	46	2	4	23	18
Total number of illustrations	9	21	20	14	34	17

Title	<i>Fancy Nancy and the Late, Late, Late Night</i>	<i>Daddy Kisses</i>	<i>Waddle</i>	<i>Mommy Hugs</i>	<i>First 100 Words</i>	<i>The Sandwich Swap</i>	<i>Gallop</i>
Numbers of female title characters	1	0	0	1	0	2	0
Numbers of male title characters	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Numbers of female main characters	1	0	0	7	0	3	0
Numbers of male main characters	1	8	0	0	0	0	0
Number of characters overall	12	14	9	8	0	3	9
Number of female child characters	6	0	0	0	0	2	0
Number of female adult characters	2	0	0	7	0	1	0
Number of male child characters	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
Number of male adult characters	1	7	0	0	0	0	0
Numbers of females in illustrations	79	0	0	8	17	76	0
Numbers of males in illustrations	28	8	0	0	38	30	0
Total number of illustrations	22	8	10	8	140	27	10

Title	<i>The Quiet Book</i>	<i>Moo, Baa, La La La</i>	<i>Guess How Much I Love You</i>	<i>Where the Wild Things Are</i>	<i>Cat</i>	<i>Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus</i>	<i>Just Grandma and Me</i>
Numbers of female title characters	0	1	0	0	3	0	1
Numbers of male title characters	0	0	2	2	0	0	1
Numbers of female main characters	0	3	0	0	75	0	1
Numbers of male main characters	0	5	2	1	6	1	1
Number of characters overall	35	19	2	8	81	4	2
Number of female child characters	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Number of female adult characters	5	0	0	1	75	1	1
Number of male child characters	0	0	1	1	0	0	1
Number of male adult characters	0	0	1	6	6	2	0
Numbers of females in illustrations	7	7	0	0	97	0	9
Numbers of males in illustrations	0	10	54	20	6	5	12
Total number of illustrations	34	13	33	22	12	35	20

APPENDIX C

Data Tables Relevant to Hypothesis 2

Title	<i>The Very Hungry Caterpillar</i>	<i>Goodnight Moon</i>	<i>On The Night You Were Born</i>	<i>Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See</i>	<i>The Lion & The Mouse</i>	<i>Love You Forever</i>
Author sex	Male	Female	Female	Male	Male	Male
Numbers of female title characters	0	0	0	0	1	0
Numbers of male title characters	1	0	0	0	1	1
Numbers of female main characters	0	4	18	1	1	1
Numbers of male main characters	1	5	2	0	1	1
Number of characters overall	1	9	41	19	5	3

Title	<i>Fancy Nancy and the Late, Late, Late Night</i>	<i>Daddy Kisses</i>	<i>Waddle</i>	<i>Mommy Hugs</i>	<i>First 100 Words</i>	<i>The Sandwich Swap</i>	<i>Gallop</i>
Author sex	Female	Male & Female	Male	Male & Female	N/A	Female	Male
Numbers of female title characters	1	0	0	1	0	2	0
Numbers of male title characters	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Numbers of female main characters	1	0	0	7	0	3	0
Numbers of male main characters	1	8	0	0	0	0	0
Number of characters overall	12	14	9	8	0	3	9

Title	<i>The Quiet Book</i>	<i>Moo, Baa, La La La</i>	<i>Guess How Much I Love You</i>	<i>Where the Wild Things Are</i>	<i>Cat</i>	<i>Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus</i>	<i>Just Grandma and Me</i>
Author sex	Female	Female	Male	Male	Male	Male	male
Numbers of female title characters	0	1	0	0	3	0	1
Numbers of male title characters	0	0	2	2	0	0	1
Numbers of female main characters	0	3	0	0	75	0	1
Numbers of male main characters	0	5	2	1	6	1	1
Number of characters overall	35	19	2	8	81	4	2

APPENDIX D

Data Tables Relevant to Hypothesis 3

Title	<i>The Very Hungry Caterpillar</i>	<i>Goodnight Moon</i>	<i>On The Night You Were Born</i>	<i>Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See</i>	<i>The Lion & The Mouse</i>	<i>Love You Forever</i>
How often are male characters portrayed as active	11	11	0	4	14	10
How often are female characters portrayed as active	0	2	1	6	19	6
How often are male characters portrayed as assertive or aggressive	0	0	0	0	5	2
How often are female characters portrayed as assertive or aggressive	0	0	0	0	4	0
How often are male characters portrayed as passive	2	45	2	0	11	8
How often are female characters portrayed as passive	0	18	16	0	18	2
How often do males appear indoors	0	44	0	0	0	13
How often do males appear outdoors	7	2	2	0	23	1

Title	<i>The Very Hungry Caterpillar</i>	<i>Goodnight Moon</i>	<i>On The Night You Were Born</i>	<i>Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See</i>	<i>The Lion & The Mouse</i>	<i>Love You Forever</i>
How often do females appear outdoors	0	9	18	0	37	1
How often are males rescued	0	0	0	0	1	0
How often are females rescued	0	0	0	0	0	0
How often are males rescuing	0	0	0	0	0	0
How often are females rescuing	0	0	0	0	1	0
How often are males nurturing	0	0	0	0	0	2
How often are females nurturing	0	2	0	0	2	3
How often are males nurtured	0	0	0	0	0	3
How often are females nurtured	0	2	0	0	0	2
How often do females appear indoors	0	20	0	0	2	7

Title	<i>Fancy Nancy and the Late, Late, Late Night</i>	<i>Daddy Kisses</i>	<i>Waddle</i>	<i>Mommy Hugs</i>	<i>First 100 Words</i>	<i>The Sandwich Swap</i>	<i>Gallop</i>
How often are male characters portrayed as active	3	7	0	0	7	12	0
How often are female characters portrayed as active	4	0	0	7	1	17	0
How often are male characters portrayed as assertive or aggressive	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
How often are female characters portrayed as assertive or aggressive	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
How often are male characters portrayed as passive	25	0	0	0	1	15	0
How often are female characters portrayed as passive	75	0	0	0	1	59	0
How often do males appear indoors	17	2	0	0	0	22	0
How often do males appear outdoors	11	7	0	0	0	8	0
How often do females appear indoors	55	0	0	2	0	49	0

Title	<i>Fancy Nancy and the Late, Late, Late Night</i>	<i>Daddy Kisses</i>	<i>Waddle</i>	<i>Mommy Hugs</i>	<i>First 100 Words</i>	<i>The Sandwich Swap</i>	<i>Gallop</i>
How often do females appear outdoors	24	0	0	6	0	27	0
How often are males rescued	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
How often are females rescued	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
How often are males rescuing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
How often are females rescuing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
How often are males nurturing	4	8	0	0	0	0	0
How often are females nurturing	1	0	0	8	0	10	0
How often are males nurtured	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
How often are females nurtured	6	0	0	0	0	10	0

Title	<i>The Quiet Book</i>	<i>Moo, Baa, La La La</i>	<i>Guess How Much I Love You</i>	<i>Where the Wild Things Are</i>	<i>Cat</i>	<i>Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus</i>	<i>Just Grandma and Me</i>
How often are male characters portrayed as active	0	5	26	16	0	2	13
How often are female characters portrayed as active	5	3	0	0	11	0	4
How often are male characters portrayed as assertive or aggressive	0	2	0	10	0	0	0
How often are female characters portrayed as assertive or aggressive	0	0	0	0	4	0	0
How often are male characters portrayed as passive	0	0	27	4	6	1	5
How often are female characters portrayed as passive	2	0	0	0	82	1	10
How often do males appear indoors	0	0	0	6	0	0	0
How often do males appear outdoors	0	0	54	14	0	5	12
How often do females appear indoors	5	0	0	0	0	0	0

Title	<i>The Quiet Book</i>	<i>Moo, Baa, La La La</i>	<i>Guess How Much I Love You</i>	<i>Where the Wild Things Are</i>	<i>Cat</i>	<i>Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus</i>	<i>Just Grandma and Me</i>
How often do females appear outdoors	1	0	0	0	0	0	9
How often are males rescued	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
How often are females rescued	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
How often are males rescuing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
How often are females rescuing	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
How often are males nurturing	0	0	12	0	0	0	0
How often are females nurturing	1	0	0	0	1	0	6
How often are males nurtured	0	0	12	0	1	0	6
How often are females nurtured	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

APPENDIX E

Data Tables Relevant to Hypothesis 4

Title	<i>The Very Hungry Caterpillar</i>	<i>Goodnight Moon</i>	<i>On The Night You Were Born</i>	<i>Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See</i>	<i>The Lion & The Mouse</i>	<i>Love You Forever</i>
Males with male-traditional occupations	0	0	0	0	2	2
Males with non-male-traditional occupations	0	0	0	0	0	0
Females with female-traditional occupations	0	0	1	1	1	1
Females with non-female-traditional occupations	0	0	0	0	0	0
Males with gender neutral occupations	0	0	0	0	0	0
Males with no occupations	0	0	2	4	1	1
Females with gender neutral occupations	0	0	0	0	0	0
Females with no occupation	0	1	18	5	0	0

Title	<i>Fancy Nancy and the Late, Late, Late Night</i>	<i>Daddy Kisses</i>	<i>Waddle</i>	<i>Mommy Hugs</i>	<i>First 100 Words</i>	<i>The Sandwich Swap</i>	<i>Gallop</i>
Males with male-traditional occupations	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Males with non-male-traditional occupations	0	7	0	0	0	0	0
Females with female-traditional occupations	0	0	0	7	0		0
Females with non-female-traditional occupations	0	0	0	0	0		0
Males with gender neutral occupations	0	0	0	0	0		0
Males with no occupations	1	8	0	0	0		0
Females with gender neutral occupations	0	0	0	0	0		0
Females with no occupation	2	0	0	7	0		0

Title	<i>The Quiet Book</i>	<i>Moo, Baa, La La La</i>	<i>Guess How Much I Love You</i>	<i>Where the Wild Things Are</i>	<i>Cat</i>	<i>Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus</i>	<i>Just Grandma and Me</i>
Males with male-traditional occupations	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Males with non-male-traditional occupations	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Females with female-traditional occupations	4	0	0	0	0	0	1
Females with non-female-traditional occupations	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Males with gender neutral occupations	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Males with no occupations	0	5	1	7	6	1	0
Females with gender neutral occupations	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Females with no occupation	1	3	0	1	75	1	0