

Ebbs and Flows in the Feminist Presentation of Female Characters among Caldecott Award-Winning Picture Books for Children

By

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Abstract

Researchers have examined the visibility and stereotyping of female characters in picture books for children at least since Weitzman et al.'s (1972) landmark study. To the best of our knowledge, however, no one has examined these traits in all of the Caldecott-Medal winning picture books since 1938. Because of the influence the Caldecott Medal, generations of girls and boys have been exposed to Medal-winning picture books even if they have been exposed to few others. Our study was guided by two broad hypotheses. First, when gender norms in the larger society are relatively settled—that is, societal norms suggest relatively unambiguously that men and women should behave in either different or similar ways, female characters are likely to be relatively plentiful in award-winning books. However, at such times female and male characters will, in general be created to conform to the norms of the larger society. Second, when gender norms are unsettled—that is, when there is societal disagreement about whether men and women should behave in different or similar ways—however, female characters will be less visible and their gendered behavior will be less predictable. Our study of the 82 Caldecott award-winning picture books provides support for these hypotheses.

Keywords: children's picture books, gender stereotyping, female visibility, content analysis.

Introduction

The first Caldecott Medal was awarded in 1938 and is not only the most prestigious award for preschool literature, but also guarantees its recipients phenomenal sales (Clark 1992). The America Library Service to Children (ALSC), a division of the American Library Association, awards the Caldecott Medal yearly to the illustrator who has created the “most distinguished” American picture book made for children.¹ The Medal assures its winners unusual influence among young children (and their parents) and makes them a likely source of ideas about gender. Our goal here is to examine Caldecott Medalists from nine decades—the 1930s, 1940s, 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, 2000s, 2010s—to determine the kinds of messages about

¹Members of the ALSC Caldecott committee vote on first, second, and third place winners determined by a point system. The overall winner must secure eight first place choices and receive eight more points than any other book. Medals are awarded the year following the nominated books' publishing.

gender young readers in each of these decades might have derived from them.

It has been almost 50 years since Weitzman et al. (1972) observed that celebrated picture books for children, published between 1967 and 1971, were largely devoid of female main characters and, in general, presented the female characters they did include in gender stereotyped ways. This study inspired a cottage industry of feminist research into the gender content and effects of children's books (e.g., Ashton 1983; Clark, Almeida, Gurka, & Middleton 2003; Clark, Guilmain, Saucier & Tavarez 2003; Clark, Kessler & Coon 2015; Clark, Lennon, & Morris 1993; Davis 1984; Gooden & Gooden 2001; Grauerholz & Pescosolido 1989; Jennings 1975; Karniol & Gal-Disegni 2009; Knopp 1980; Koblinsky, Cruse, & Sugawar 1978; Koike & LaVoie 1981; Kropp & Halverston 1983; Lutes-Dunckley 1978; McCabe, Fairchild, Grauerholz, Pescosolido & Tope 2011; Ochman 1996; Peirce & Edwards 1988; Peterson & Navy 1990; Purcell & Stewart 1990; Scott & Feldman-

Summers 1979; St. Peter 1979; Sugino 2000; Tepper & Cassidy 1999; Turner-Bowker 1996; White 1985; Williams, Vernon, Williams, & Malecha 1987). Some of these studies, using experimental methods, have found support for the hypothesis that storybooks are among the factors that shape children's use and development of conventional and atypical gender stereotypes (e.g., Ashton 1983; Scott & Feldman-Summers 1979; Jennings 1975; Karniol & Gal-Disegni 2009). "Gender stereotypes" may be defined as "pictures in our heads" of the ways males and females act in a society (Kenschaft & Clark 2016).

Most of the other studies have examined the degree to which gender stereotyping and/or female visibility are present in certain kinds of children's books. At one point, it was plausibly argued that these studies had themselves led to changes in picture books towards greater female visibility and less gender stereotyping (e.g., Clark, Lennon & Morris 1993; Clark Kulkin & Clancy 1999; Clark, Almeida, Gurka & Middleton 2003). One of the goals of the current paper is to present our examination of Caldecott Medal books to ascertain whether such changes have continued to occur in the twenty-first century.

Our Expectations

We came to our study unsure of what we would find. One possibility was that we would find that, over time, Caldecotts have consistently made female characters more visible and presented them in less stereotyped ways. Several studies (e.g., Clark, Lennon, & Morris 1993; Clark, Almeida, Gurka, & Middleton 2003; Clark, Kessler & Coon 2015) had found that there was a greater relative visibility of female characters, and less stereotyping, in the late 1980s and 1990s than there had been in the late 1960s, the period covered by Weitzman et al. (1972). Perhaps such progress, by liberal feminist standards, would have been characteristic of the entire period (1938 to 2018) during which Caldecotts had been awarded.

But we did not really believe our data would bear out this "onward and upward" thesis. History, as we know, involves ebbs and flows in virtually every arena of human endeavor. And we had reason to believe that the presentation of gender in children's picture books was likely to be one such arena. McCabe et al. (2011), for instance, had examined the titles and main characters in 5,618 children's books published in the 20th century and found that, while the visibility of female characters did increase from the 1960s to the

1990s, it had actually been highest in the 1910s. They interpreted these findings, in part, with the notion that, in periods—like the 1910s and the post-1960s—when women's rights were a significant social and political issue, authors, publishers and award givers were likely to make female characters more visible than at other times. Moreover, Clark, Guilmain, Saucier & Tavarez (2003) had examined both visibility and stereotyping in Caldecott award winners and runners-up in the last few years of each decade between the 1930s and 1960s. They found evidence that in decades like the 1930s and 1950s, when traditional gender norms² were most clearly embraced by the U.S. population at large, female characters were, in fact, unusually visible, if also unusually stereotypically portrayed. These authors suggested that, in times when there is relatively little conflict over gender norms, authors, publishers and award givers have little trouble with books presenting female characters visibly and stereotypically.

No study that we are aware of has focused exclusively on all the Caldecott-Medal winners since 1938. The studies that have looked at both the visibility of female characters and the degree of their stereotyping have examined only winners (and runners-up) at the close of each decade rather than the whole of the decade. And even those that have examined both visibility and stereotyping have failed to look at award winners over the whole course of the period that the Caldecott Medal has been awarded.

Finally, we found ourselves disinclined to credit the "onward and upward" thesis coming out of research focused on children's books written between the end of the 1960s and the end of the first decade of the 21st century. Given our understanding of historical ebbs and flows, as well as the findings of McCabe et al. (2011) and Clark et al. (2003), we hypothesized there would be local variation by decade in both the visibility and stereotyping of female characters depending on the state of gender politics in each decade. In general, we expected that female characters would be most visible in decades when there was general agreement about gender expectations. Thus, *in the 1930s and the 1950s we expected that Medal-winning books would be more likely to focus on female characters* because there was general agreement that men and women should have distinct roles in society. *We also believe that in the 1930s and 1950s, male and female characters would tend to be portrayed as behaving in traditionally stereotypical ways.*

²In this paper "gender norms" refer to informal rules and shared expectations that distinguish behavior based on gender. One example of a traditional gender norm is that girls and women should do the majority of domestic work.

Between the 1970s and the 1990s, however, the second wave of feminism would have favored males and females doing more similar things with their lives.

There might not have been complete agreement about these egalitarian norms³ in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, but these norms were surely better established in those decades than they had been in the 1960s (see next paragraph). *Consequently, we anticipate that female characters would have had relatively high visibility in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, but that the behaviors of male and female characters would have been less traditionally stereotypical in those decades than they had been in the 1930s and 1950s.*

The second wave of feminism created upheaval in gender norms during the 1960s. The publication of books like Betty Friedan's (1963) *The Feminine Mystique*, the founding of the National Organization of Women and the emergence of, and political activity associated with, various branches of feminism challenged notions of conventional femininity and masculinity. *We posit it would have been more challenging, then, for authors and publishers in the 1960s to know how females "should" be presented, so they might be expected to have presented fewer of them. It is possible, however, that the presentation of the relatively few female characters created in this decade would have been less stereotypical than it had been in the 1930s and 1950s.*

Our expectations about the decades of the 1940s, 2000s and 2010s were less definite than for the other decades largely because we have greater difficulty characterizing the prevailing gender norms of the times. Our difficulty with the 1940s is that, with the benefit of historical hindsight, we think of it as a decade in which the norms of its first half—when women were being drawn into the workplace during World War II—and the norms of the second—when they were being asked to return to traditional roles in the home—were very different. On the other hand, *the norms of both halves of the 1940s were relatively clear and, so, given our suggestion that in times when gender roles are reasonably clear, more female characters will be presented in children's book, we might expect reasonably high female visibility throughout the decade. Still, given the divided nature of the decade in terms of the dominant norms, we would expect less stereotyping of female characters in the 1940s than occurred in either of the surrounding decades—the 1930s and 1950s—but perhaps more stereotyping than occurred in the books of the 1960s.*

Historical hindsight is less useful for the 2000s and

almost entirely useless for the current decade, the 2010s. There is certainly some evidence that the march towards gender equality continued apace after the 1990s. The percentage of the US Congress that is female, for example, has almost doubled since 2000 (Manning & Burdick 2019). On the other hand, progress has notably stalled on some fronts. The female labor force participation rate, for instance, dropped from 61% in 2000 to 57.5% in 2016 (Black, Schanzenbach, & Breitweiser 2017). Moreover, while the gender segregation of occupations (i.e., the tendency of many occupations to have workers who are predominantly one gender or the other) consistently diminished between 1970 and 2000, it has undergone essentially no change since 2000 (Kenschaft & Clark 2016:47-49).

Despite the uncertainty that we feel about the nature of gender norms of the first two decades of the 21st century, our general impression has been that they are ones in which the egalitarianism, that characterized the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, continued to prevail. *Therefore, we hypothesized female characters in books of the 2000s and 2010s would be no less visible than they were in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s and that there would be no more stereotyping of female and male characters in those decades than there had been in the last three decades of the 20th century.*

Methods

We collected data about the recipients of the Caldecott medal, an award given by the American Library Association to the most distinguished children's picture book of the year. Our population was 82 books, published from 1937 to 2018 (see Appendix A). The concepts of interest were female visibility and gender stereotyping. We measured female visibility using four indicators: the percentage of books in each decade that had females characters at all, the percentage of books in each decade with a central female character, and the percentage of human single-gender illustrations that depict girls or women, and the percentage of single-gender non-human (usually animal) illustrations that depict females. We tended to give greatest emphasis to the second of these indicators, the percentage of books in with central female characters, when comparing female visibility across the nine decades, though all indicators informed our overall impression of female visibility.

We measured gender stereotyping in terms of traits that have been seen traditionally as either stereotypically feminine or masculine. We relied on Davis' (1984) set

³One example of an egalitarian gender norm might be that girls and women and boys and men should share domestic work.

of variables for dealing with 14 gender-related traits (see Appendix B for variable definitions). Adjectives that we associated with the stereotypically feminine were: dependent, cooperative, submissive, creative, imitative, nurturant, and emotional. Adjectives we saw as stereotypically masculine were: independent, competitive, directive, persistent, explorative, aggressive, and active. We assessed as many as two characters per book: the major female character, if there was one, and the major male character, if there was one.

Four of us individually coded each book, to ensure inter-rater reliability. We then compared our findings and created a final evaluation by utilizing a majority rules method. If three or four of us independently decided that a character possessed a trait, we accorded this trait to that character. If three or four decided that a character did not have a trait, we decided the trait was not present. If there was a tie (with two of us seeing a trait and two not seeing it), we assigned a missing value to the relevant character and that character was deleted in analysis of that trait. Finally, we made comparisons within the decades about the presence of traits among female and male characters. Because there were never more than 10 (and, in the case of the 1930s, only three) books examined in individual decades, and because we were examining the whole population of Caldecott winners, not a sample of them, we did **not** calculate the statistical significance of percentage differences. As a result, we interpreted the differences we did find as theoretically suggestive rather than as definitive. We decided that percentage differences characterizing female and male characters in a decade were indeed “different” only if they could **not** be explained by differences in the number of males and females, alone. Thus, if five of nine (55%) of females had a trait and five of 10 (50%) of males did, we did **not** count this as a difference because the disparity could have been due to differences in the numbers of females and males. If, however, four of nine (44%) of females had a trait and six of 10 (60%) of males did, we did count this as a “real” difference because this difference is not simply a reflection of the difference in the number of females and males.

Results

As we had expected, our analysis provided almost no support for the view that Caldecott winners presented female characters ever more visibly and non-stereotypically over time. We observed much more support for the view that there was local variation by

decade, based on the prevailing gender norms of the decade. We present our results, decade by decade.

The 1930s

The first three Caldecott medalists, the only ones published during the 1930s, were published in 1937, 1938 and 1939. These were the only winners of the 1930s. Consequently, we hesitate to make too much of the results for this decade. Those results, however, are consistent with our expectations that, because gender norms during the Depression decade favored men working outside the home and women staying inside those homes, female characters would be highly visible, compared to other decades, and be portrayed stereotypically.

Table 1 shows that all three winners had female characters and two of the three (67%) had central female characters. We also judge that the female characters of the 1930s were presented very stereotypically. Table 2A shows that females were portrayed as more dependent, creative, imitative and emotional than male characters, while male characters were more independent, competitive, directive, persistent and active than females (i.e., differences are consistent with the view that gendered behaviors were stereotypical on nine of the 14 traits examined) (see Table 2A). Two of the three Medal winners (Fish and Lathrop’s [1937] *Animals of the Bible: A Picture Book* and the D’Aulaire’s [1939] *Abraham Lincoln*) may have reflected a desire on the part of the Caldecott committee to reach back to American and Western stories and myths during the tumultuous Depression years, but they were also so long that they could hardly have omitted female characters. The other winner, Handforth’s (1938) *Mei Li*, focused on a surprisingly active female and, by itself, accounts for the two instances of reverse stereotyping⁴ found among the 1930s books.

The 1940s

The early 1940s involved a period when women were actively recruited into the workforce (think; Rosie the Riveter), a direct result of World War II. The late 1940s were a time, however, when women were encouraged to get back into the home, while men returned from the war and were encouraged to become “breadwinners” again. 1940s Caldecott winners ranked as one of the highest in female character visibility (see Table 1) and

⁴Mei Lei, a spirited young girl, intent on testing limits, was neither particularly cooperative nor nurturant.

one of the lowest in gender-stereotyping (see Table 2A). Males and females were deemed equally persistent, a trait that is most often associated with males. Both *Many Moons* (1943) and *Make Way for Ducklings* (1941) feature very persistent and directive female characters (Lenore and Mrs. Mallard, respectively). We see male characters (like Mr. Mallard, the King and Juan) take on more female-associated traits, such as dependence and nurturance, in *Make Way for Ducklings* (1941), *Many Moons* (1943) and *Song of the Swallows* (1949).

The 1950s

The Cold War began soon after the end of World War II and at the end of the 1940s. Marriage rates skyrocketed during this decade and traditional gender roles were strongly encouraged through the media and even through anti-communist propaganda. The Caldecott winners of the 1950s reflected these gender norms, presenting characters with gender-stereotyped traits that were the equal of those in the 1930s (see Table 2B). This decade's winners also had one of the highest numbers of central female characters and female illustrations (see Table 1). Female characters in *Cinderella* (1954) and *Nine Days to Christmas* (1959) were portrayed as nurturant and dependent. The intrinsic tensions of late 1950's gender norms laid the foundation for the 2nd wave of feminism in the 1960s. Could this be the reason why some female characters near the end of the 1950s are found to be more independent than those of the first half? The daughter in McCloskey's (1957) *Time of Wonder* is both persistent and explorative as she looks into the natural world around Penobscot Bay, Maine.

1960s

The 1960s brought with them the rise of the 2nd Wave Women's movement, a movement that stirred great controversy about how women and men should act, and we believed that authors would have a more difficult time deciding what the roles for the female characters should take on. We thought this might mean that authors would tend to leave female characters out of their books due to these conflicts. And we found this to be true.

Although 80% of the books did have at least one female character present, only 30% of the books had a central female character (see Table 1). Females appeared in 14% of the human single-gendered illustrations and in only four percent of the non-human single-gendered illustrations.

Table 2B suggests that during this time period stereotyping characters by their gender dropped by a great deal. Female characters still appeared to be nurturant (100% of the female central characters exhibited nurturance, compared to only 22% of males). Male characters were also more active than female characters (100% of male characters versus 33% female characters). Regarding dependence, however, we found an interesting reversal: only 20% of the central female characters were portrayed as dependent, while 60% of the male characters had this characteristic. Baboushka, from *Baboushka and the Three Kings* by Ruth Robbins (1960), was both independent and active. This character did **not** have the stereotypical dependence that tradition associated with females. In fact, Baboushka, like the three kings with whom she shares the book's title, pursues a search for the newborn baby, Jesus. She, however, does her search alone. Consequently, we found that female and male characters the 1960s evinced as little stereotyped behavior as they did in any other decade. This was an unexpected finding and one about which we will say more in our Conclusion.

1970s

We expected that the award-winning books of the 1970s would contain more visible female characters than the 1960s books. We also expected the 1970s books to present female characters in less stereotypical ways than, say, the books of the 1930s and 1950s did. We found support for both of these hypotheses. The results show, for example, that 100% of the 1970s books portrayed a female character and 60% of them had a central female character (see Table 1). There was less stereotyping than we found in books of the 1930s or the 1950s. Male characters tended to be more submissive and more creative than female characters (see Table 2C). In the book *The Funny Little Woman* by Arlene Mosel (1972), the little woman shows great independence and persistence, following a dumpling (yes, a small ball of dough), and consequently runs into the Oni monsters, from whom she escapes through brilliant planning and surprising energy.

1980s

The Caldecott award recipients from the 1980s show a moderate amount of female visibility. As Table 1 shows, females are depicted in 24% of the total single-gendered human illustrations. This result is largely due to the book *Lan Po Po: A Red-Riding Hood Story from*

China. The only human characters in *Lan Po Po* are three sisters who make up 100% of the book's single-gendered human illustrations. Fifty percent of the 1980s books have a main female character.

Regarding gender stereotyping, the Caldecotts from the 1980s again evince less stereotyping than winners of the 1930s and 1950s; the differences between female and male characters being in the stereotyped direction on seven traits, as opposed to nine traits in the 1930s and 1950s (see Table 2C). Still, this is a relatively high number of stereotyped differences for the post-1960s period. And *Una* from *Saint George and the Dragon* exhibits eight stereotypical traits including dependence and nurturance, even though other female characters, such as *Judy* from *Jumanji*, show few (four) stereotypical traits and more reverse-stereotypical traits such as independence and persistence.

1990s

Female visibility in the 1990s Caldecott winners was similar to that of the 1980s winners, so much so that we ranked them together. Table 1 shows that there was an increase in the prevalence of female characters from 80% in the 1980s to 90% in the 1990s. However, the prevalence of main female characters *decreased* from 50% in the 1980s to 40% in the 1990s.

Some of the 1990s winners had a significant number of female single-gender illustrations. In *Mirette on the High Wire*, 10 out of 14 single-gendered illustrations were female. Other books had fewer, but most (six of 10 of the books) had at least some single-gendered female illustrations.

The female characters from the 1990s' books were slightly less stereotyped than those in the 1980s. We noted only six of the 14 traits about which we observed female and male differences. The differences in these two decades agreed with stereotyped expectations (see Table 2D). *Mama* in Bunting's (1994) *Smoky Night*, is perhaps the least stereotyped female character from the decade. She is portrayed as thoughtfully directive, non-imitative, and independent as she protects her son Daniel from the ravages of a Los Angeles riot. However, protecting her son is an indication of her profoundly nurturing character.

2000s

We found that the 2000s' Caldecotts ranked near the middle of the nine decades examined here in terms of female-character visibility. As Table 1 shows, 50% of

its books had a major female character. And, as Table 2D suggests, these female characters were tied with those in the 1960s for being the least stereotyped. They were slightly less competitive, more dependent and less directive than their male counterparts. But on all 11 other characteristics examined their presentation was either not stereotyped or reverse-stereotyped, at least in comparison with the male characters presented in winners of the 2000s (see Table 2D).

The only reason that females do **not** appear in a higher percentage of single-gender human pictures (only 16%) in this decade's winners is because of the presence of Selznick's (2007) graphic novel, *The Invention of Hugo Cabret*, on this decade's list of winners. The 65 images in this book show only males, mainly Hugo. But the 11 images that show only a female (Isabelle) depict her as a very independent, explorative and active girl. In this regard, Isabelle is typical of other female characters in this decade's winners.

2010s

Tables 1 and 2E provide evidence that the 2010s winners exhibited slightly more female visibility than those of any decade since the 1970s but also slightly more stereotyping than those of any decade since the 1980s. Fifty five percent of the books had a major female character and differences on seven of the behavioral traits in our stereotyped direction suggest moderate gender stereotyping.

Closer inspection of the data makes the visibility of female characters in this decade stand out. The percentage of single-gender human images that are female (41%) is second only to that of the 1950s (65%). The percentage of single-gender non-human images (100%) is only matched by the 1990s.

And even the 2010's modest record on stereotyping is complicated. While the award winners of the 2010s do apparently exhibit stereotyping on seven behavioral traits, there is only a substantial difference between male and female characters on one of these (persistence). Moreover, once one gets into the 2010s books, a reader sees that what may appear stereotyped in terms of our coding rules might actually be much more ambiguous in fact. Thus, for example, we observed and coded Basquiat's mother in Javaka Steptoe's (2016) *Radiant Child: The Story of Young Artist Jean-Michel Basquiat* as profoundly nurturing of the young artist's skills both because of her artistic instruction and the model of her own art. However, this character is also a mother whose inner turmoil requires that she be taken away from

Basquiat's home to get help—and, therefore, in a sense, she ends up deserting him.

CONCLUSION

Children's books have been shown to affect the acquisition and enactment of gender stereotypes among young children (e.g., Ashton 1983; Scott & Feldman-Summers 1979; Jennings 1975; Karniol & Gal-Disegni 2009). Caldecott Medal books, because of their prestige, sales and circulation (Clark 1992), are among the books most likely read to young children, and so deserve close attention.

We examined all 82 of the picture books that had been awarded the Caldecott Medal by the American Library Association between 1938 and 2019. Largely because of the possibility of the “symbolic annihilation” (e.g., McCabe et al. 2011) of female characters, we were as interested in the degree to which females were visible in these books as we were in the degree to which they were stereotyped. We thought it possible that there might have been a steady improvement, by feminist standards, over time: one towards increased female visibility and decreased stereotyping. Instead, we found an ebb and flow in the visibility and stereotyping of female characters in these books. We speculate that in large measure, this ebb and flow is dependent on the dominant societal views about appropriate gendered behavior in each decade.

Before we began our research, we had speculated that the visibility of female characters in Caldecott Medal winners would depend on the degree to which there was relatively little societal controversy about how women and men should behave. Our data support this hypothesis. Thus, the decade in which there was perhaps the greatest tension over gender roles, the 1960s—the decade in which the 2nd wave of feminism was bursting onto the American cultural scene—is the decade in which we found the lowest visibility of female character, by almost every measure we use here. For example, only 30 percent of the 1960s Caldecott winners had a central female character, whereas 70 percent of 1950s winners did. The finding about low female visibility in 1960s children's books is consistent with results reported by Weitzman et al. (1972) and McCabe et al. (2011) and is now affirmed by data about (likely) the most influential children's books of the decade—the Caldecott Medalists. There was not quite a “symbolic annihilation” of female characters during this decade, but a young female reader of this decade's Medalist winners might well have gotten the impression that females were less important

than males in American society because of their relative absence in these books.

By contrast, the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s were the decades in which the visibility of female characters was greatest in the population of Caldecott winners, with the 1950s perhaps being the decade in which they enjoyed the greatest visibility. The 1950s was the only decade when the images of female characters constituted a majority of the human single-gendered illustrations. The “Ozzie and Harriet” decade gave cover to authors, publishers and award-givers to depict female characters liberally—as long as the female characters were portrayed in a particular way, which, as we also showed, they were. The same sort of “cover” was provided by the gender Zeitgeist of the 1930s. There were no Ozzies and Harriets modeling behavior then, but there were directive Wizards (of Oz) and Dorotheas, dreaming of home. Government and business propaganda films, often shown as trailers before the main event, kept women (and men) clearly informed of what was expected of them during the 1940s, even though those expectations changed radically as men returned from the battles of World War II.

Every decade since the 1960s has yielded Caldecott Medalists in which female characters were more visible than they were in the 1960s; but no decade produced winners in which females were more visible than they were in the 1930s, 1940s or 1950s. We had wondered whether Medalists of the 2000s and 2010s would be more visible than they had been in the 1960s, since we were unsure that gender norms were any more settled, especially in the 2010s, than they were in the 1960s. Apparently, authors, publishers and American Library Association award-givers did **not** feel particularly inhibited about the creation, publication and awarding of books with female characters in these decades. We speculate that the reason that female visibility in Caldecotts has not re-achieved its levels of the 1930s through the 1950s, however, reflects continuing ambiguity about appropriate gender behavior. Although this ambiguity was perhaps most confusing in the 1960s, it may not have completely dissipated yet. Egalitarian norms have penetrated most social arenas, but they do not yet enjoy the consensus that traditional gender norms did in the 1950s in many of these arenas yet.

In general, we expected that the degree to which male and female characters were stereotyped would also vary with the degree of consensus about gender norms in the larger society. We found less support for this “stereotyping” hypothesis than we did for our “visibility” hypothesis, although we found a good deal of support

for it as well. As one might expect, given the hypothesis, the 1930s and the 1950s were the decades in which the most stereotyping was found in the behavior of female and male characters. There was less stereotyping of gendered characters in the 1940s, a finding consistent with our view that this was a decade in which strong, but opposing, signals were given to women about appropriate work-related behavior outside the home at different times.

Intermediate levels of stereotyping of gendered characters were also found in all post-1960s decades, with one exception. Again, these intermediate levels are consistent with a view that, while egalitarian norms were more strongly informing Americans' behavior than they had before, they were still not as pervasive as traditional gender norms had been in the 1930s and 1950s. The one exception among the post-1960s decades was in the 2000s, a decade in which stereotyping among Caldecott characters was very low indeed. This finding would be consistent with a view that egalitarian gender norms were as pervasive during the 2000s as they'd been during the period studied here. Even in this decade, however, major male characters were more notably achieving than major female characters. Thus, all the of the U. S. Presidents mentioned in St. George's book (2000), *So You Want to Be President*, achieved more celebrity than did Isabelle in Selznick's book (2007), *The Invention of Hugo Cabret*. And, after all, the titular invention was Hugo's, not Isabelle's.

The most surprising deviation from our "stereotyping" hypothesis occurred in books of the 1960s. This was the decade in which we expected to see low female visibility—which we did—but, at best, moderate levels of stereotyping. Instead, our data suggested very low levels of stereotyping occurred in the characters of this decade. This finding stands in contrast with that of Weitzman et al.'s (1972) claim that female characters of the latter part of the 1960s were very stereotyped. We attribute this discrepancy, to some degree, to our including books from the early part of the decade as well. Samantha in Ness's (1966) *Sam, Bangs, and Moonshine* is an extremely helpless little girl who relies on her father to save the boy, Thomas, whom she's sent on a perilous mission to save her cat, Bangs. Ness's book was a central example in Weitzman's study. The fact that we examined books from the entire decade, as well as the fact that there are so few female characters in the first half of the 1960s, means that any unusually "masculine" female character from that first half could tip our findings in the opposite direction. And one did. Thus, Babouschka in Robbins' (1960) *Baboushka and*

the Three Kings, a traditional Russian Christmas story, had outsized influence on our findings. Babouschka is an elderly Russian peasant who, like the three kings of more conventional Christmas stories, goes off in search of the baby Jesus. A more persistent, explorative, and independent female character is hardly imaginable.

The Caldecott Medalists of the 1960s, perhaps particularly because of their surprising evidence of reverse stereotyping, stand as an object lesson about the limitations of our study. We divided the population of our units of observation (Caldecott Medalists) into nine groups by decade of publication. The resulting numbers-- at most 10 books per decade, did not allow decisive within-decade or between-decade comparisons. Thus, one or two books in a decade *could have* a large impact on our findings. All our conclusions, then, must remain more tentative than we would have liked.

Nonetheless, our research does suggest that the nature of a period's gender norms can have a large impact on both the visibility of female characters and the degree to which they are presented in stereotypical ways in Caldecott award-winning books. When gender norms are well agreed upon, whether or not they suggest that men and women should behave differently or in similar ways, female characters in these children's picture books seem to become more visible than they are when gender norms are widely disputed. However, to the degree that there is agreement upon gender norms, female (and male) characters are likely to exhibit behaviors that conform to those norms.

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Table 2A. Comparison of Female and Male Character Traits by Decade: 1930s and 1940s

Character Traits	1930s Caldecott Winners		1940s Caldecott Winners	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
Dependent	100	0 S	67	75 T
Independent	50	100 S	67	100 S
Cooperative	0	100 R	67	83 T
Competitive	0	100 S	0	0 T
Directive	0	100 S	33	20 R
Submissive	0	0 T	0	20 R
Persistent	50	100 S	60	60 T
Explorative	100	100 T	17	80 S
Creative	50	0 S	40	20 S
Imitative	50	0 S	0	0 T
Nurturant	0	100 R	67	67 T
Aggressive	0	0 T	0	33 S
Emotional	50	0 S	40	25 S
Active	50	100 S	33	83 S

Note: In the nine Male columns in Tables 2A-E, the code “S” indicates a **stereotypical difference** between female and male characters on the character trait; The code “T” indicates an **essential tie** on the character trait; The code “R” indicates a **reverse-stereotypical difference** on the character trait.

Table 2B. Comparison of Female and Male Character Traits by Decade: 1950s and 1960s

(Numbers Represent Percentage of Characters with Relevant Trait)

Character Traits	1950s Caldecott Winners		1960s Caldecott Winners	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
Dependent	83	40 S	20	60 R
Independent	80	100 S	80	89 T
Cooperative	100	100 T	60	80 R
Competitive	14	33 S	0	10 S
Directive	17	60 S	25	50 S
Submissive	67	60 T	0	25 R
Persistent	100	83 R	75	88 T
Explorative	57	67 T	40	50 T
Creative	50	0 S	17	57 R
Imitative	0	0 T	0	0 T
Nurturant	67	40 S	100	22 S
Aggressive	0	17 S	0	0 T
Emotional	75	50 S	33	38 T
Active	86	100 S	33	100 S

Note: In the nine Male columns in Tables 2A-E, the code “S” indicates a **stereotypical difference** between female and male characters on the character trait; The code “T” indicates an **essential tie** on the character trait; The code “R” indicates a **reverse-stereotypical difference** on the character trait.

Table 2C. Comparison of Female and Male Character Traits by Decade: 1970s and 1980s

(Numbers Represent Percentage of Characters with Relevant Trait)

Character Traits	1970s Caldecott Winners		1980s Caldecott Winners	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
Dependent	60	67 T	50	29 S
Independent	80	86 T	60	100 R
Cooperative	50	75 R	100	88 S
Competitive	0	13 S	0	25 S
Directive	50	57 T	75	43 R
Submissive	17	33 R	40	29 S
Persistent	60	86 S	80	88 T
Explorative	40	63 S	75	72 T
Creative	67	88 R	50	55 T
Imitative	0	0 T	20	0 S
Nurturant	40	29 S	50	38 S
Aggressive	0	13 S	20	22 T
Emotional	40	25 S	25	56 R
Active	80	86 T	100	86 R

Note: In the nine Male columns in Tables 2A-E, the code “S” indicates a **stereotypical difference** between female and male characters on the character trait; The code “T” indicates an **essential tie** on the character trait; The code “R” indicates a **reverse-stereotypical difference** on the character trait.

Table 2D. Comparison of Female and Male Character Traits by Decade: 1990s and 2000s

(Numbers Represent Percentage of Characters with Relevant Trait)

Character Traits	1990s Caldecott Winners		2000s Caldecott Winners	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
Dependent	40	38 T	100	33 S
Independent	100	88 R	100	100 T
Cooperative	100	100 T	67	63 T
Competitive	0	0 T	0	11 S
Directive	25	29 T	0	57 S
Submissive	25	11 S	0	0 T
Persistent	20	100 S	60	75 T
Explorative	20	33 S	100	75 R
Creative	0	67 R	100	71 S
Imitative	40	0 S	0	11 R
Nurturant	100	71 S	20	20 T
Aggressive	0	0 T	0	0 T
Emotional	75	50 S	33	25 T
Active	75	78 T	100	86 R

Note: In the nine Male columns in Tables 2A-E, the code “S” indicates a **stereotypical difference** between female and male characters on the character trait; The code “T” indicates an **essential tie** on the character trait; The code “R” indicates a **reverse-stereotypical difference** on the character trait.

Table 2E. Comparison of Female and Male Character Traits by Decade: 2010s

(Numbers Represent Percentage of Characters with Relevant Trait)

Character Traits	2010s Caldecott Winners	
	Female	Male
Dependent	75	50 S
Independent	83	100 S
Cooperative	100	83 S
Competitive	14	20 T
Directive	0	14 S
Submissive	20	0 S
Persistent	25	85 S
Explorative	67	50 R
Creative	20	33
Imitative	0	0 T
Nurturant	86	67 S
Aggressive	0	0 T
Emotional	50	60 T
Active	100	100 S

Note: In the nine Male columns in Tables 2A-E, the code “S” indicates a **stereotypical difference** between female and male characters on the character trait; The code “T” indicates an **essential tie** on the character trait; The code “R” indicates a **reverse-stereotypical difference** on the character trait.

APPENDIX A. Caldecott Medal Winners Organized by Decade and Year Published

Decade Published	Year Published	Book Title	Author	Publisher	
1930s	1937	Animals of the Bible	Dorothy P. Lathrop	J. B. Lippincott & Co.	
	1938	Mei Li	Thomas Handforth	Doubleday and Company	
	1939	Abraham Lincoln	Ingri & Edgar Parin d'Aulaire	Doubleday and Company	
1940s	1940	They Were Strong and Good	Robert Lawson	The Viking Press	
	1941	Make Way for Ducklings	Robert McCloskey	The Viking Press	
	1942	The Little House	Virginia Lee Burton	Houghton Mifflin Company	
	1943	Many Moons	James Thurber	Harcourt, Brace & Company	
	1944	Prayer for a Child	Rachel Field	The Macmillan Company	
	1945	The Rooster Crows	Maud & Miska Petersham	The Macmillan Company	
	1946	The Little Island	Margaret Wise Brown & Leonard Weisgard	Doubleday and Company	
	1947	White Snow, Bright Snow	Alvin Tresset	Lothrop, Lee & Shepard Books	
	1948	The Big Snow	Berta & Elmer Hader	The Macmillan Company	
	1949	Song of the Swallows	Leo Politi	Charles Scribner's Sons	
	1950s	1950	The Egg Tree	Katherine Milhous	Charles Scribner's Sons
		1951	Finders Keepers	Will & Nicolas	Harcourt, Brace & Company
		1952	The Biggest Bear	Lynd Ward	Houghton Mifflin Company
		1953	Madeline's Rescue	Ludwig van Bemelmans	The Viking Press
		1954	Cinderella	Marcia Brown & Charles Perrault	Charles Scribner's Sons
1955		Frog Went A-Courtin'	John Langstaff	Harcourt, Brace & Company	
1956		A Tree is Nice	Janice Udry	Harper Collins	
1957		Time of Wonder	Robert McCloskey	The Viking Press	
1958		Chanicleer and the Fox	Barbara Cooney	Thomas Crowell Company	
1959		Nine Days to Christmas	Maria Hall Ets	The Viking Press	
1960s	1960	Baboushka and the Three Kings	Ruth Robbins	Parnassus Press	
	1961	Once a Mouse	Marcia Brown	Charles Scribner's Sons	
	1962	The Snowy Day	Ezra Jack Keats	The Viking Press	

	1963	Where the Wild Things Are	Maurice Sendak	Harper Collins
	1964	May I Bring a Friend?	Beatrice Schenk de Regniers	Atheneum Books
	1965	Always Room for One More	Sorsche Nic Leodhas	Holt, Reinhart & Company
	1966	Sam, Bangs & Moonshine	Evaline Ness	Holt, Reinhart & Company
	1967	Drummer Hoff	Barbara Emberly	Simon & Schuster
	1968	The Fool of the World and the Flying Ship	Arthur Ransome	Farrar, Straus & Giroux
	1969	Sylvester and the Magic Pebble	William Steig	Simon & Schuster
1970s	1970	A Story, A Story	Gail E. Haley	Atheneum Books
	1971	One Fine Day	Nonny Hogrogian	The Macmillan Company
	1972	The Funny Little Woman	Arlene Mosel	E. P. Dutton Company
	1973	Duffy and the Devil	Harve & Margot Zemach	Farrar, Straus & Giroux
	1974	Arrow to the Sun	Gerald McDermott	The Viking Press
	1975	Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears	Verna Aardema	Dial Press
	1976	Ashanti to Zulu: African Traditions	Margaret Musgrove	Dial Press
	1977	Noah's Ark	Peter Spier	Doubleday and Company
	1978	The Girl Who Loved Wild Horses	Paul Goble	Bradbury Press
	1979	Ox-Cart Man	Donald Hall	The Viking Press
1980s	1980	Fables	Arnold Lobel	Little, Brown & Company
	1981	Jumanji	Chris Van Allsburg	Houghton Mifflin Company
	1982	Shadow	Marcia Brown	Charles Scribner's Sons
	1983	The Glorious Flight: Across the Channel with Louis Bleriot	Alice & Martin Provensen	The Viking Press
	1984	Saint George and the Dragon	Margaret Hodges	Little, Brown & Company
	1985	The Polar Express	Chris Van Allsburg	Houghton Mifflin Company
	1986	Hey, Al	Arthur Yorinks	Farrar, Straus & Giroux
	1987	Owl Moon	Jane Yolen	Philomel Books
	1988	Song and Dance Man	Karen Ackerman	Alfred A. Knopf
	1989	Lon Po Po: A Red-Riding Hood Story from China	Ed Young	Philomel Books

1990s	1990	Black and White	David Macaulay	Houghton Mifflin Company
	1991	Tuesday	David Wiesner	Clarion Books
	1992	Mirette on the High Wire	Emily Arnold McCully	G. P. Putnam's Sons
	1993	Grandfather's Journey	Allen Say	Houghton Mifflin Company
	1994	Smoky Night	Eve Bunting	Harcourt, Brace & Company
	1995	Officer Buckle and Gloria	Peggy Rathmann	G. P. Putnam's Sons
	1996	Golem	David Wisniewski	Clarion Books
	1997	Rapunzel	Paul O. Zelinsky	Dutton Children's Books
	1998	Snowflake Bentley	Jacqueline Briggs Martin	Houghton Mifflin Company
	1999	Joseph Had a Little Overcoat	Simms Taback	The Viking Press
2000s	2000	So You Want to Be President?	Judith St. George	Philomel Books
	2001	The Three Pigs	David Wiesner	Clarion Books
	2002	My Friend Rabbit	Eric Rohmann	Roaring Brook Press
	2003	The Man Who Walked Between the Towers	Mordicai Gerstein	Roaring Brook Press
	2004	Kitten's First Full Moon	Kevin Henkes	Greenwillow Books
	2005	The Hello, Goodbye Window	Norton Juster	Michael di Capua Books/ Hyperion Books
	2006	Flotsam	David Wiesner	Clarion Books
	2007	The Invention of Hugo Cabret	Brian Selznick	Scholastic Press
	2008	The House in the Night	Susan Marie Swanson	Houghton Mifflin Company
	2009	The Lion & the Mouse	Jerry Pinkney	Little, Brown & Company
2010s	2010	A Sick Day for Amos McGee	Philip C. Stead	Roaring Brook Press
	2011	A Ball for Daisy	Chris Raschka	Schwartz & Wade Books
	2012	This is Not My Hat	Jon Klassen	Candlewick Press
	2013	Locomotive	Brian Floca	Atheneum Books
	2014	The Adventures of Beekle: The Unimaginary Friend	Dan Santat	Little, Brown & Company

	2015	Finding Winnie: The True Story of the World's Most Famous Bear	Lindsay Mattick	Little, Brown & Company
	2016	Radiant Child: The Story of Young Artist Jean-Michel Basquiat	Javaka Steptoe	Little, Brown & Company
	2017	Wolf in the Snow	Matthew Cordell	Feiwel & Friends
	2018	Hello Lighthouse	Sophie Blackall	Little, Brown & Company

APPENDIX B: Behavioral Definitions⁵

Dependent: seeking or relying on others for help, protection, or reassurance; maintaining close proximity to others.

Independent: self-initiated and self-contained behavior, autonomous functioning, resistance to externally imposed constraints.

Cooperative: working together or in a joint effort toward a common goal, complementary division of labor in a given activity.

Competitive: striving against another in an activity or game for a particular goal, position, reward; desire to be first, best, winner.

Directive: guiding, leading, impelling others toward an action or goal; controlling behaviors of others.

Submissive: yielding to the direction of others; deference to wishes of others.

Persistent: maintenance of goal-directed activity despite obstacles, setbacks, or adverse conditions.

Explorative: seeking knowledge or information through careful examination or investigation; inquisitive and curious.

Creative: producing novel idea or product; unique solution to a problem; engaging in fantasy or imaginative play.

Imitative: duplicating, mimicking, or modeling behavior (activity or verbalization) of others.

Nurturant: giving physical or emotional aid, support, or comfort to another; demonstrating affection or compassion for another.

Aggressive: physically or emotionally hurting someone; verbal aggression; destroying property.

Emotional: affective display of feelings; manifestation of pleasure, fear, anger, sorrow, and so on via laughing, cowering, crying, frowning, violent outbursts, and so on.

Active: gross motor (large muscle) physical activity, work, and play.

⁵These behavioral definitions are from Davis, A. 1984. "Sex-Differentiated Behaviors in Nonsexist Picture Books." *Sex Roles*. 11:1-15.