

## The Princess and the Poor Self-Image

### *An Analysis of Newbery Medal Winners for Gender Bias and Female Underrepresentation Leading into the Twenty-First Century*

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This study analyzes how 12 recent (2000-2011) Newbery Medal-winning books represent gender. The study counts how many of the books' characters represent progressive or traditional gender roles, how many male and female characters represent each character category (protagonist, antagonist, major, and minor), how many strong female characters are accepted or rejected by their peers, how many characters hold stereotypical gender beliefs about themselves or their peers, and how many works contain balanced feminist perspectives. The study finds equitable female representation, but the study also finds a bias toward traditional male stereotypes. The results indicate a general acceptance of strong female characters and a balanced representation of females, regardless of a historical fiction classification. These results suggest that characters in Newbery Medal-winning books represent gender more equally and less stereotypically compared to characters in works of earlier decades.

## Introduction

Young children are susceptible to outside opinions and media bias as they internalize perceptions of gender (Gordon, 1962; Hamilton, Anderson, Broaddus, & Young, 2006). Children's books in particular affect children's views of gender in crucial ways. This study therefore critically evaluates the content of children's literature in terms of gender bias. The sample of children's books used in this study includes 12 recent Newbery award-winning novels from the years 2000 through 2011 (See Appendix A).

John Newbery Medal-winning books are examined because they are generally accessible in libraries and widely read by children. The stories and characters in the books play a central role in the enculturation of American children. Many librarians and teachers esteem the Newbery Medal-winning novels as “distinguished contributions” to the canon of American children’s literature (Association for Library Service to Children, 2011). In the researchers’ personal experiences, librarians and teachers in Pennsylvania often recommend the books to children and emphasize the prestige of award-winning titles. Librarians and teachers should be aware of the subtext and impact these books contain for young readers. The results of this study are significant because they may affect how Newbery Medal-winning books are evaluated and utilized by librarians and teachers in Pennsylvania.

## Literature Review

The depiction of females in children’s literature varies. Fairy tales, for instance, place high importance on females’ natural beauty and passiveness. Females perform traditional tasks that are either quiescent (sewing, cooking) or frivolous (dancing, singing) in comparison with males’ activities (Kuon & Weimar, 2009). In the same stories, females can be strong, but when they are strong they are also usually the evil antagonist punished at the story’s end (Kuon & Weimar, 2009). Alternatively, modern authors create strong and active female protagonists, but within their description is the idea that they are “strange” or they are complete rarities in their communities (e.g., she likes to climb trees while peers prefer dolls) (Rudman, 1995, p. 178). Both types of representation—the weak and powerless as well as the strong but isolated—create a sense of loneliness or lead to negative feelings in female readers (Rudman, 1995). Such stereotyped works expose female readers to the perception that they must either be demure or an outsider.

Gender depictions matter to young readers. Young girls who have exposure to biased literature where females are depicted as weak have both lower self-esteem and lower aspirations for the future (Hamilton et al., 1996). Equally disturbing, when young males read the same works, they feel naturally entitled and superior to females (Hamilton et al., 2006). Building a strong self-concept and self-esteem is an ongoing process that continues through pre-adolescence, and is a result of “gender role socialization” (Salkind, 2002, p. 162). In terms of gender, negative portrayals can affect children who have yet to solidify their self-concepts (Narahara, 1998). Children who are exposed to non-discriminatory literature show a decrease in gender-stereotyped beliefs (Narahara, 1998).

Children and pre-adolescents are the targets of new books each year, and while the prevalence of gender bias in children’s literature may be partly determined by publishing incentives (Rudman, 1995), librarians and teachers can still choose which books to recommend to young readers. Recommending appropriate books for children is important because, besides families, media and books are the primary sources of information regarding societal expectations, behaviors, and values (Rice, 2002). Gender is a primary social category children become aware of as they develop and learn definitions of feminine and masculine (Rice, 2002). When children read, they become acquainted with culture and subconsciously recognize traditional male and female roles.

Gender depiction can be difficult in the historical fiction genre. Those who read and write historical fiction must balance historical accuracy with artistry (Donelson & Nilsen, 2009). Children’s literature of the past is fraught with examples of male domination. While it may be the case that authors must conform to the cultures and philosophies held by those in that time period, these vestigial norms must be balanced with more progressive views of gender (Clapp-Itnyre, 2007). One solution is first-person narrative female empowerment. This strategy provides direct access to the personal thoughts of a strong, feminine character (Clapp-Itnyre, 2007).

Several previous studies investigate gender discrimination in children’s literature and most examine picture books. While the methods of previous studies differ in subject and depth, the conclusion is clear: written works for children need stronger female roles. Each study below indicates gender bias in favor of males.

Powell, Gillespie, Swearington, and Clements (1998) analyzed characters of Newbery Medal-winning books by decade from the 1920s through the 1990s. The study focused on the gender of the main characters as well as their portrayals and roles in the story. The roles were split into progressive female, traditional female, progressive male, and traditional male. The occurrence of female main characters increased each decade: In the 1920s, 100% of the main characters were male and 0% were female; by the 1990s, 40% of the main characters were male, 50% were female, and 10% of the novels contained both a male and a female protagonist (Powell et al., 1998). The portrayals also began as very traditional for both males and females and became more progressive, especially in female characters, in later decades (Powell et al., 1998).

There is ample evidence for gender bias in other areas of children's literature. The most recent studies in the area of literary gender bias have three different manners of sampling children's literature: by popularity, within Notable Children's Books, and within popular classic Western fairy tales. All results indicate a lack of strong female characters or a lack of female characters in general. Hamilton et al. (2006) revealed that males are depicted 53% more often than females, and females are seen in more traditional roles such as a nurturer and are most often depicted in indoor settings. Gooden and Gooden (2001) reviewed 83 of the American Library Association's Notable Books for Children between 1995 and 1999. The study concluded that while females and males are depicted nearly equally, and while females are more often present in the written portions of the works, males are more often seen in illustrations and in more dominant roles with a larger variety of occupations.

Kuo (2006) took a different approach to gender analysis in literature: several ethnic groups reviewed popular fairy tales in Western culture (*Rapunzel*, *The Princess and the Pea*, and *FaMulan*) to determine if bias was present in the stories and, if so, what these biases taught Western children. The results indicated that the stories depicted females as helpless in the role of a nurturing mother or dutiful daughter; they depicted females in the role of a sexual/passionate woman; or they depicted females as dominant but evil.

Gender bias still remains in children's literature. Allen, Allen, and Sigler (1993) examined Caldecott Medal-winning books from the 1980s. In 7 out of 11 designated categories, males were dominantly portrayed. In both text and illustrations, male characters were represented 20% more often and were classified as the more active gender. Additionally, the authors compared this analysis of 1986-1988 Caldecott books to an analysis of 1938-1940 Caldecott books and deduced an increase in female representation and a decrease of females portrayed in traditional roles. Allen et al. (1993) identified a shift toward a more balanced female representation across decades, despite continued bias of stereotypes.

Creany (1995), however, examined Caldecott Award-winning books published from 1970 to 1979 and then compared the results to Caldecott Award-winning books published between 1980 and 1995. In the 1970s, males were more dominantly represented and both genders portray traditional roles. In the analysis of the later years, there was a more balanced depiction and fewer traditional gender roles: males were still greater in number, but more men were depicted as passive and more women were depicted as active (Creany, 1995). Female representation has increased in recent decades with more progressive role depiction. It seems gender bias is less overt, but children's literature overall does not present many strong female characters.

Few studies concern gender bias in juvenile books. This study therefore continues the research initiated by Powell et al. (1998) to determine to what extent the underrepresentation of females persists in juvenile fiction.

## Methodology

This study investigated the extent to which 12 recent Newbery Medal-winning books contain gender bias toward females. Please consult Appendix A for a full list of the 12 books read for this research and Appendix B for definitions of key terms.

This study examined the following aspects of gender representation:

- progressive and traditional roles and activities represented by the genders,
- representation of males and females in each category of characters (protagonist, antagonist, major, and minor),
- the rejection or acceptance of strong female role models by peers,
- stereotypical beliefs held by the characters regarding the same and opposite gender,
- balanced female gender roles in works of historical fiction.

This study analyzed stereotypical roles using two sets of criteria: an adjective list that represents the stereotypical behaviors and attitudes of males and females; and a generalized list of stereotypical gender roles and activities that represent characters as masculine or feminine. These lists drew from those used in previous studies (Cooper, Scher, & Mirabile, 2005; Swim & Hyers, 2009). The analysis of behaviors and attitudes was based in part on a list constructed by an international group of researchers who surveyed 9,000 people, both children and adults, from 32 countries, including the United States, about gender stereotypes in their own country, regardless of whether they actually held stereotypical beliefs (Best, 2003). The survey used by Best (2003) provided 300 adjectives and asked participants to sort these by association between male, female, or androgynous. Next, Best (2003) cross-referenced the list with the adjectives used by previous studies to determine gender bias. Similar words—for example, kind and thoughtful—were grouped together into one area. Males were associated with independence, emotional stability, aggressiveness or assertiveness, confidence, arrogance or ignorance, physical strength, bravery, selfishness, and masculinity. Females were associated with dependence or dutifulness, sensitivity, thoughtfulness, gentleness, curiosity, physical weakness, anxiety, selflessness, and femininity. Best (2003) concluded that these latter nine adjectives described feminine gender. These nine adjectives were therefore used to identify traditional or stereotypical femininity in the Newbery Medal-winning stories in this study.

The stereotypical and traditional roles and activities were evaluated based on criteria developed by Swim and Hyers (2009). The main questions pertained to stereotyped behaviors of females versus males and asked if the males and females were passive or active in the story (Hamilton et al., 2006), if the female spent more time indoors or outdoors (Allen, Allen, & Sigler, 1993), if the female was rescued or rescues another (Hamilton et al., 2006), and if the female was seen as a nurturer or mother-figure (Kuo, 2006). Traditionally, or stereotypically, feminine characters were passive, spent more time indoors, required rescuing, and were nurturing.

Progressive roles and behaviors were defined by Powell et al. (1998), the only study that analyzed progressive roles in addition to traditional roles. In the present study, progressive males were emotive/willing to share emotions and were nurturing. Progressive females were aggressive/assertive, physically strong, brave, independent, and intelligent. These traits were not simply the opposites of the traditional roles, but were specifically chosen as traits that created stronger, rounded characters who defied stereotypes.

Female characters are often socially rejected by peers when cast as independent and strong role models. This study therefore recorded not only whether a female is independent, but also how peers reacted to her ideas and actions of individualism and self-sufficiency.

In addition to the above considerations regarding gender depiction, this study also recorded any stereotypical beliefs that characters generally held about their own or the opposite gender. In effect, the research indicated how biased the characters themselves are versus how biased the work depicts female and male roles and behaviors. For instance, a male character may believe a girl of his same age cannot throw a baseball well, but the girl manages to throw a perfect curve ball and win the game. In this example, the girl exhibits physical strength and self-reliance while the boy holds a negative stereotype against her abilities. These recorded beliefs may not necessarily have a direct impact on the plot, but characters' beliefs may leave young readers with an impression as to how strong or weak the characters are.

Finally, works of historical fiction were evaluated in terms of how they balance female perspectives. If a Newbery Medal winner is classified as historical fiction, the work was analyzed for evidence of strong feminist viewpoints. This was determined to exist if a female is defiant, despite dominating male authority figures, independent in trade or activities, or if she has strong mental struggles against her male opponents. If gender bias was not a strong issue in the story's era, then the work was determined to be neutral in terms of female depiction.

Each trait or role described above was examined throughout each entire novel. A trait counted toward a character's analysis if the trait was a defining attribute of a character, not simply an individual occurrence. By examining multiple aspects of every character, the research points out any unique occurrences of attitudes versus actions. To illustrate this, consider *Chains* (Anderson, 2008) where the female protagonist acts the way she is expected to as a female slave in early America, but secretly plots her own rebellion. We may, therefore, obtain a higher level of understanding in regards to the character's deeper motivation via an analysis of the thought process in addition to an analysis of the character's outward behavior.

The research was a qualitative content analysis of the 12 books listed in Appendix A. The coding sheet (Appendix C) was based on Kitchen (2000) and her research method on stereotypes of librarians in literature. The characters that this study counted for the variables were both major and minor characters with a separate section for the protagonist(s) and antagonist(s). Backdrop characters are not included in the analysis due to their negligible impact on the story and simplistic composition.

The variables examined are as follows: the number of female and male characters, progressive and traditional roles for males and females, stereotypical beliefs among the characters regarding their own or the opposite gender, peer rejection due to strong female behavior, and balancing female perspectives in works of historical fiction. Counts were made of each variable and percentages created from this information in order to determine if a bias, stereotype, or underrepresentation exists within each text and the works as a whole.

A bias, stereotype, or underrepresentation exists in either an individual work or twenty-first century Newbery award-winning books as a whole under the following conditions: Male characters occur more often than female characters in either category of protagonist, antagonist, or minor characters; females or males are depicted in traditional roles, or females are depicted in traditional roles while males are given non-traditional roles; females are depicted as passive more often than males; or strong females are rejected by peers for being different. More than one stereotype may exist within a book on the reading list.

## Hypotheses

The predictions for the study were as follows:

1. Females will be depicted less often than males (at least one-third of the protagonists will be female).
2. The major female character(s) will be viewed as odd or outsider due to her/their behavior(s).
3. Males and females will more often appear in traditional gender roles in both attitudes and activities (females will cook, males will fight, etc.).
4. If the book is a work of historical fiction, there will be a greater gender bias (in the form of a lessened female empowerment or perspective).

These expectations were based on previous studies and personal experience in providing literature to young adults and adolescents. While there is the view that publishers target reluctant young male readers by disproportionately publishing works with strong male protagonists (Rudman, 1995), there also seems to be an upsurge in female protagonists in young adult literature due to the appeal of romance. The characters often find themselves in an emotional as well as physical struggle, which is more natural to convey via a female voice. This

pattern is most likely not repeated in juvenile fiction as their intellectual struggles are outside the realm of intimate love. This observation should even support the idea that more males are present in juvenile literature as they are often seen as more adventurous and less focused on emotions (allowing the plot to move forward at an acceptably fast pace).

## Results

The various groups of characters are broken down by gender. The character groups include Protagonist, Antagonist, Major, and Minor (Figure 1).

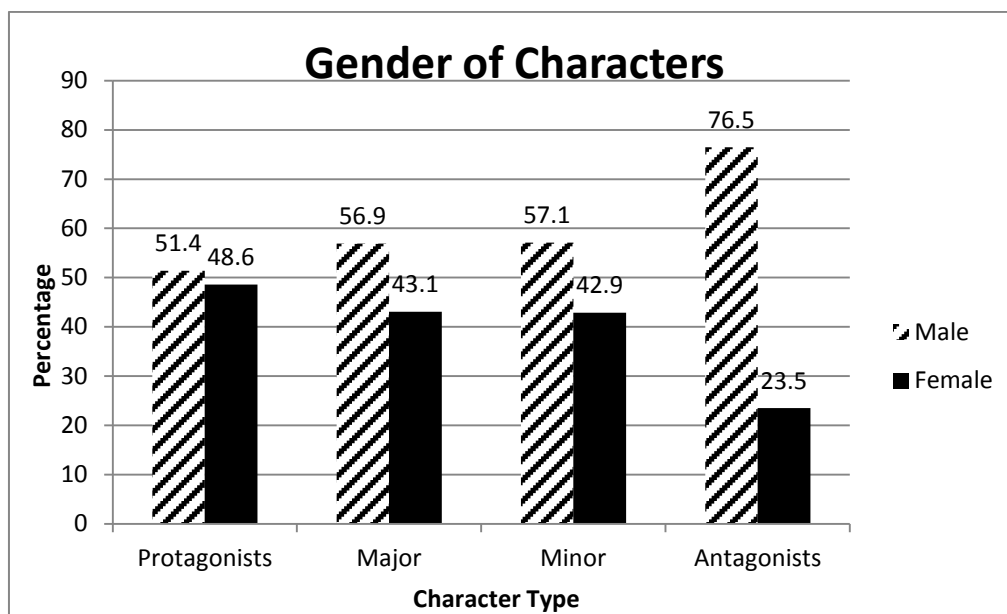


Figure 1

*The gender of characters divided by character type (protagonist, antagonist, major, and minor characters). Males and females have nearly equal representation with the exception of antagonists.*

Protagonists are 51.4% male (n=18) and 48.6% female (n=17). Some stories have multiple protagonists of both genders. In comparison with Powell et al.'s (1998) study, there is a balance between male and female representation.

No previous studies examine other character groups, but it is important to draw a larger picture of gender representation within literature for juveniles. Major characters are 56.9% male (n=29) and 43.1% female (n=22). Minor character depiction is the most skewed between genders with 57.1% male (n=40) and 42.9% female (n=30), but both genders are relatively well-represented. Antagonists are not present in over half of the stories, but within all the works studied, 76.5% of antagonists are male (n=13) and 23.5% are female (n=4). This is the largest percentage difference for gender representation in the study and may have a connection to the traditional depictions of males manifesting in the form of aggression.

This study shows a great difference between the traditional and progressive depictions of males and females. Within the history of gender roles in Newbery Medal winners, females have a large increase in progressive



roles while males are often portrayed traditionally (Powell et al., 1998). The results of this study confirm the findings from previous studies.

Characters are either active or passive overall in their portrayals in the story. Activeness is generally a male role and passiveness is generally a female role (Hamilton et al., 2006). For female protagonists, 94.1% are active (n=16) and 5.9% are passive (n=1) (Figure 2). For male protagonists, 88.9% are active (n=16) and 11.1% are passive (n=2) (Figure 3). Protagonists are generally active in all the stories regardless of gender. Occasionally, a character begins as passive but is forced into a more active role as the story develops, as with Katie in *Kira Kira* (Kadohata, 2003). For antagonists, both males and females are active 100% of the time when there is an antagonist present. Antagonists create the tension within the story and so must be active. For female major characters, 84.6% are active (n=22) and 15.4% are passive (n=4) (Figure 2). For male major characters, 71.0% are active (n=22) and 29.0% are passive (n=9) (Figure 3). Both genders have a majority of major characters with an active portrayal. For female minor characters, 50% are active (n=15) and 50% are passive (n=15) (Figure 2). For male minor characters, 50% are active (n=20) and 50% are passive (n=20) (Figure 3). In minor characters, both genders have a closer balance with active versus passive. Each category has an increase in passive characters as the role has a decrease of control over the plot. It is likely that character position and authority has more effect over a character's activeness or passiveness than gender.

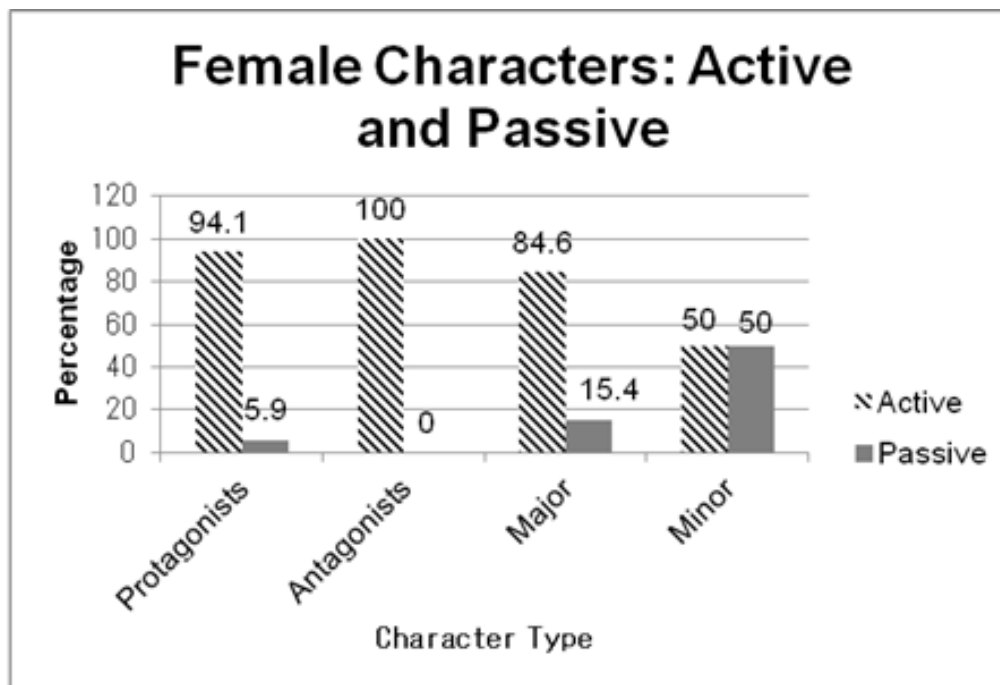


Figure 2

*Females divided by overall activeness or passiveness. It is likely that character position and authority has more supremacy in determining a character's active or passive stance, rather than gender.*

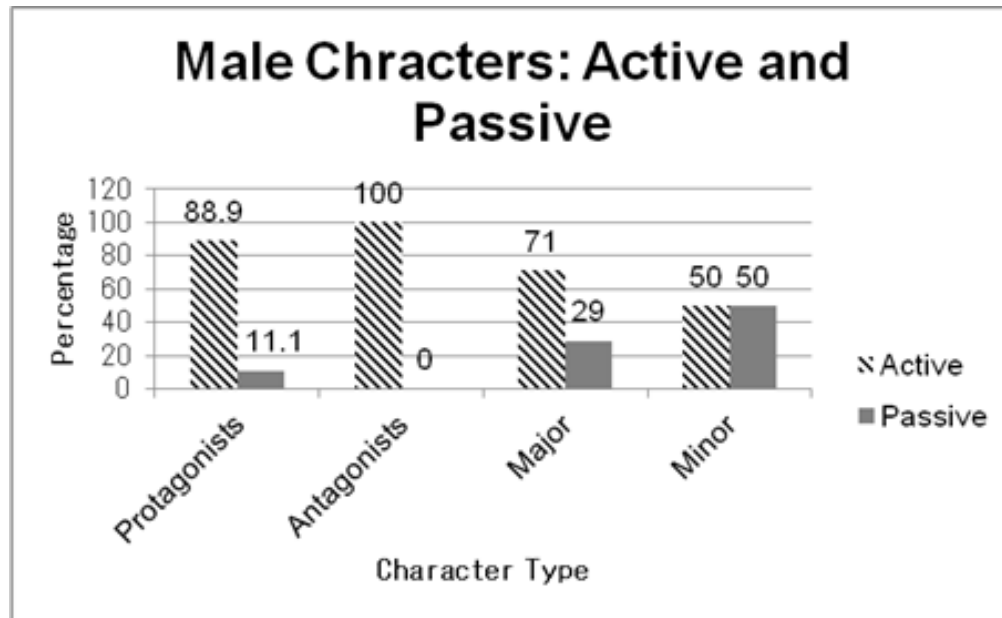


Figure 3

*Males divided by overall activeness or passiveness. This chart is very similar to Figure 2 in its results.*

Traditional and progressive male and female roles for the characters were evaluated throughout each of the stories. Distinct exhibitions of roles and traits on part of a character's development or part in a story were recorded for each class of character. Individual traditional and progressive roles for males and females are listed within Figures 4, 5, 8, and 9; for males, nine traditional roles (Figure 4) and two progressive roles (Figure 5) were examined for occurrences and for females, nine traditional roles (Figure 9) and five progressive roles (Figure 8) were examined for occurrences. Males have a stronger portrayal of traditional roles (91.4%, n=74) than progressive roles (8.6%, n=7) (Figure 6). Of the traditional traits for males, independence (37.8%, n=28) and aggression (28.3%, n=21) are the most highly featured, with the remaining 33.9% (n=25) representing all of the other traditional role observations (Figure 4). The protagonists show the highest instances of independence and bravery in any male character category. Male characters infrequently exhibited progressive traits; those who exhibited progressive traits were most often caring at 85.7% (n=6) and infrequently emotional or willing to share emotions at 14.3% (n=1) (Figure 5). Males more often exhibit traditional roles than progressive roles at a ratio of approximately 10:1 (Figure 6).



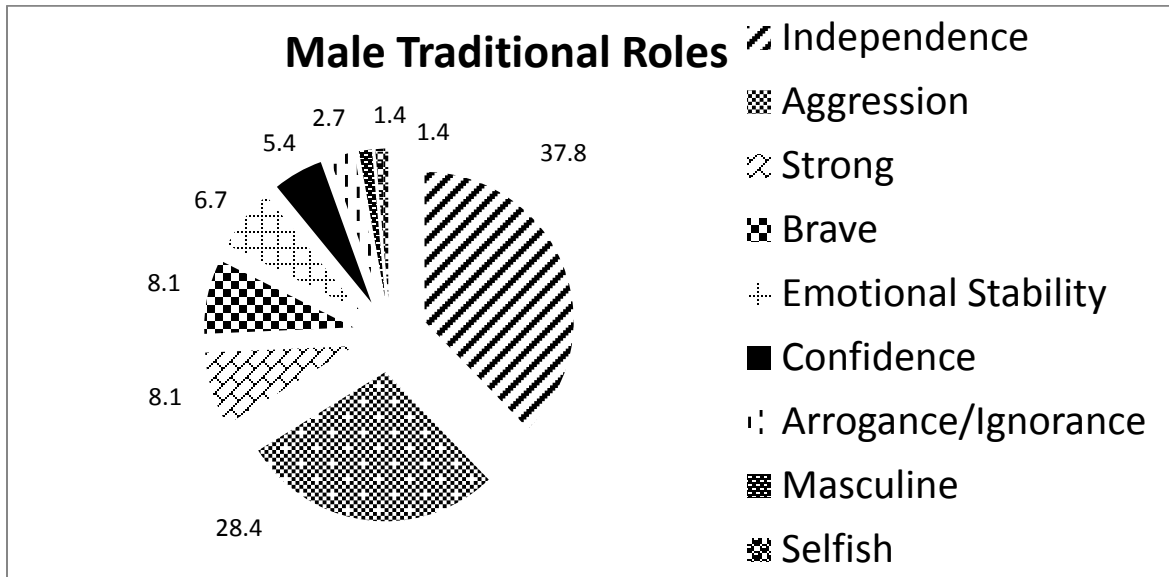


Figure 4

Featured male traditional roles in male characters. To assist in this chart's comprehension, the roles have been organized clockwise: "Independence" begins with the largest portion with diagonal lines, followed by "Aggression", etc. going clockwise on the chart.

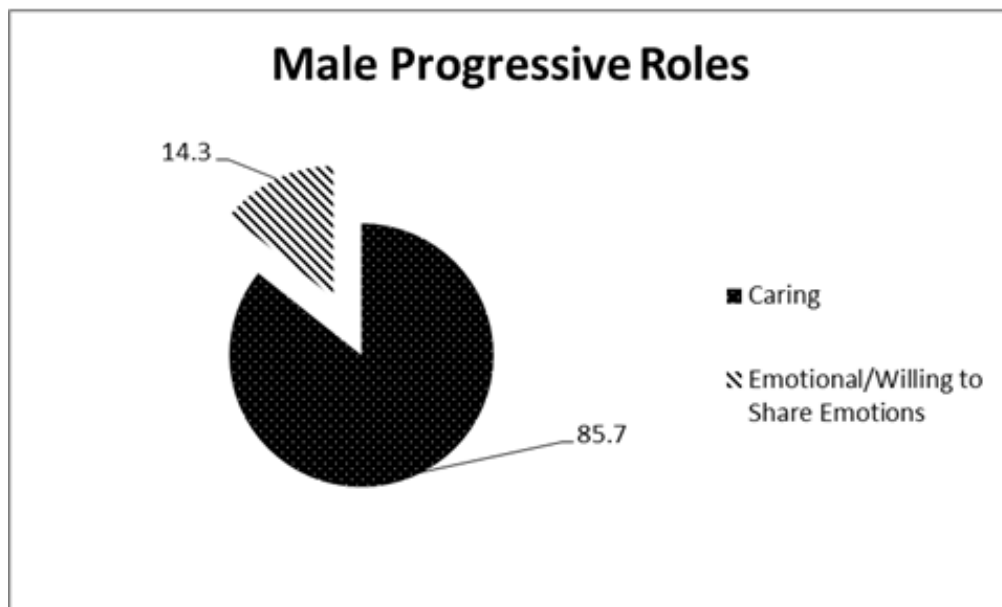


Figure 5

Male progressive roles. Though male characters infrequently exhibited any progressive trait, those that did engage in progressive roles most often did so through a willingness to share emotions.

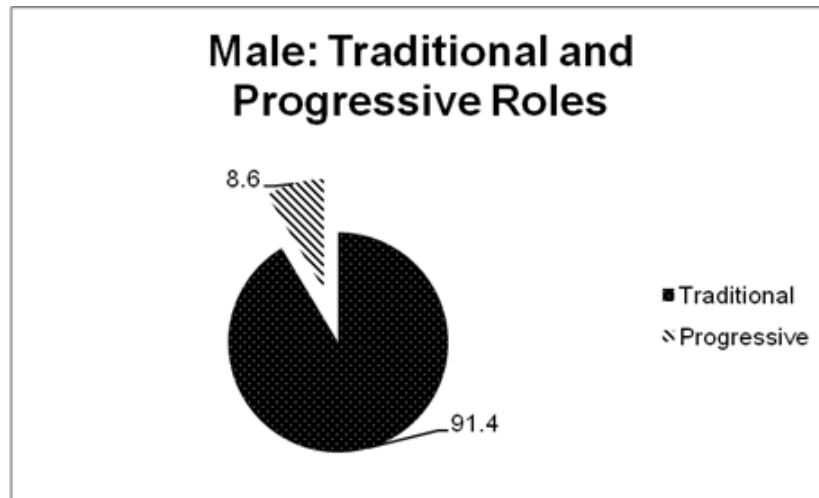


Figure 6  
*Ratio of traditional versus progressive roles males portray. Males have a clear traditional bias in their representation.*

Females have a closer balance between the portrayal of traditional and progressive roles: 52.5% of the identified traits are progressive (n=42) and 47.5% of the identified traits are traditional (n=38) (Figure 7). While this still leaves traditional roles as the majority, females are clearly being depicted more progressively than males. At 44.7% (n=17), independence is the highest-recorded progressive trait for females (Figure 8). The lowest occurring traditional roles displayed in Figure 9 are gentle (3.85%, n=2), helpless (3.85%, n=2), and timid/anxious (1.92%, n=1). The highest occurring traditional role is kind/thoughtful (31%, n=13), showing that females still retain a positive role while exhibiting independence, as opposed to increased signs of aggression (Figure 8). The ratio for female traditional roles versus female progressive roles is nearly balanced at 1:1 (Figure 7).

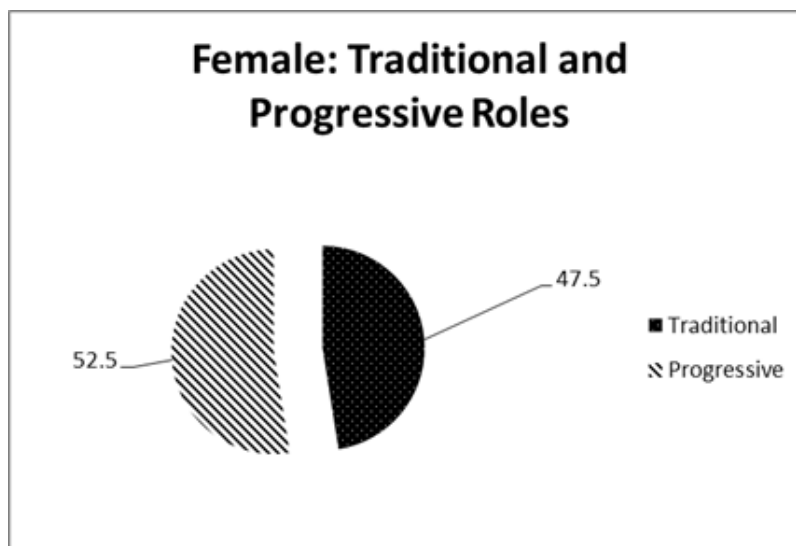


Figure 7  
*Ratio of traditional versus progressive roles females portray. The representation between traditional and progressive roles is nearly equal for females.*

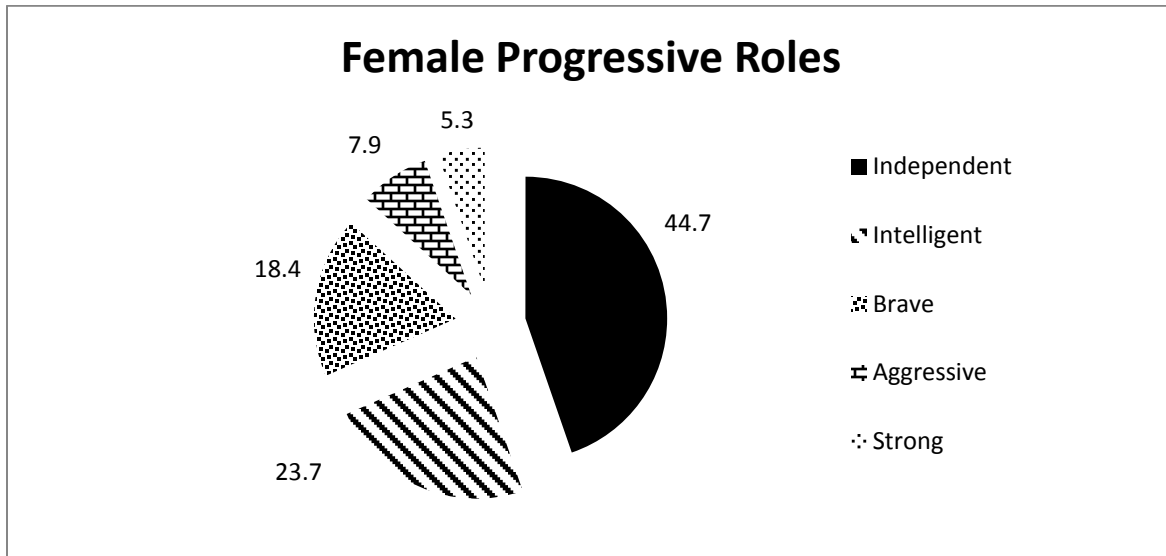


Figure 8  
 Female progressive roles. Independence is by far the most highly exhibited role.

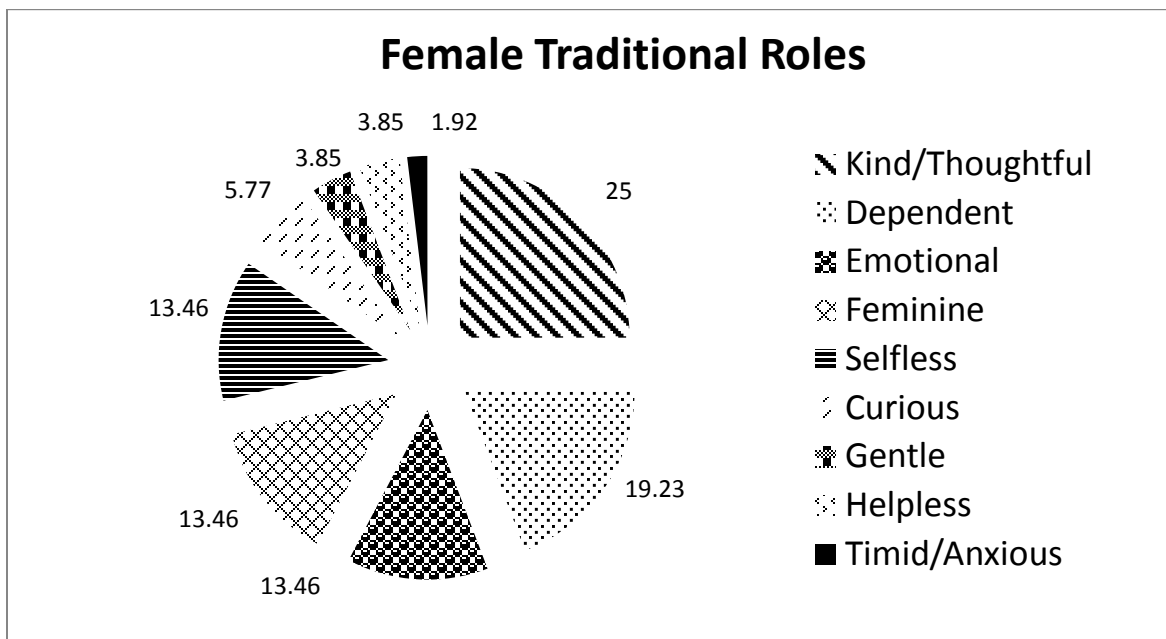


Figure 9  
 Featured female traditional roles in female characters. To assist in this chart's comprehension, the roles have been organized clockwise: "Kind/Thoughtful" begins with portion with diagonal lines, followed by "Dependent" with white dots, etc., going clockwise on the chart.

Gender depiction greatly differs from one story to the next. Males exhibit more traditional than progressive roles, while females have nearly a balance between the two categories. The ratio is approximately 5:1, with 38 progressive role instances for females and 7 progressive role instances for males. For traditional traits, 42 traditional role instances were observed for females versus 74 traditional role instances for males (Figure 6 and Figure 7).

The authors of this study examined female characters more closely for certain behaviors including time spent indoors or outdoors, instances of rescuing or requiring rescue from another character, and overall nurturing behavior, as these are the most prominent traditional roles of classic fairy tales and stories (Kuon, 2009). In the area of fairy tale-esque behaviors, females are again very progressive. Female protagonists are more often depicted in an outdoor environment 53% of the time (n=9) and female characters are the rescuer (n=9) versus the rescued (n=4) at a ratio of almost 2:1, indicating an inclination toward a very progressive and strong female depiction. In terms of nurturing characters, protagonists are nurturing 47.1% of the time (n=8), major characters 30.8% of the time (n=8), and minor characters 46.7% of the time (n=14). Female protagonists and major characters have other defining characteristics and functions to accompany their caring or nurturing attitude such as bravery or independence, but minor nurturing characters often function as only a nurturer.

Along with examining a character's behavior, this study also considers peers' and fellow characters' reactions to outward behavior as well as the effect the time period may have on the roles (i.e., historical fiction). The following analysis concerns the rejection or acceptance of strong female role models by peers, the stereotypical beliefs held by the characters regarding the same and opposite gender, and balance or imbalance perspectives of feminist views in works of historical fiction.

This study finds that female major characters or protagonists are not often depicted as exceptionally strong, as strong-willed, or as strong-minded. However, female characters are usually accepted by their peers or surrounded by like-minded females. These strong females are accepted with no negative consequences 75% of the time (n=3) (Figure 10). In one instance, a female is rejected out of fear for her abilities. Grandma Dowdel in *A Year Down Yonder* is intimidating to the other citizens through her forward manner (Peck, 2000). Overall, young girls within the stories have open-minded peers and are encouraged to be stronger.

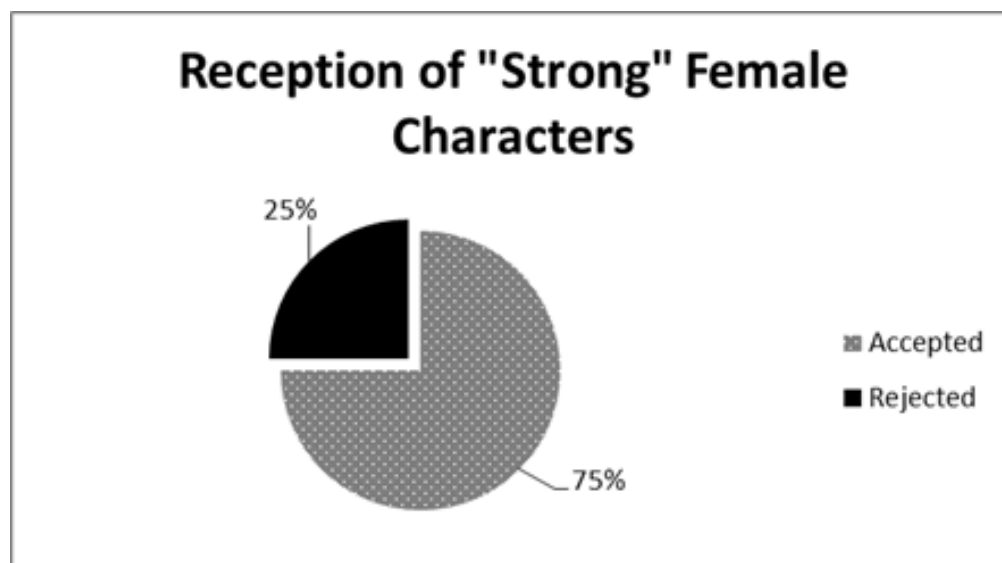


Figure 10

*The percentage of females rejected or accepted by their peers for their strong behaviors including actions such as independence and activeness.*

The stereotypical beliefs voiced by characters of both genders (either to readers or other characters) are often the same for both genders (Table 1). Males and females both believe that men should be physically strong, though females also hold beliefs that men are much more aggressive than women even when they lack evidence. In addition,

males and females hold firm beliefs that females are weak and helpless or else highly prim and feminine. Some characters then play these roles to gain acceptance or attention (e.g., *When you Reach Me, Kira Kira*) while others resent this idea and defy it (e.g., *Moon Over Manifest, Crisscross*).

Table 1

*Stereotypical beliefs of males and females in Newbery award-winning novels regarding both males and females. Ex. "Males believe males are physically strong."*

	Males believe ...	Females believe ...
<b>Males are . . .</b>	"Physically Strong"	"Physically Strong" "Aggressive"
<b>Females are . . .</b>	"Weak" "Helpless"	"Weak" "Helpless"

In this research, six books were classified as historical fiction and reviewed for feminine empowerment. *Good Masters! Sweet Ladies!* (Schiltz, 2007) was broken into 21 individual portions, one for each story in the book, lending the research a total of 26 works of historical fiction. Four of the five novels have female empowerment throughout the story in the form of females who have several progressive traits such as high intelligence, bravery, and independence. These females are older or authoritative women who make good role models for the protagonist (whether male or female). The novel with no balancing female perspective is *A Single Shard* (Park, 2001). Ajima is the only female mentioned in the story and she is noted as being "almost invisible" about the house, taking an active role only through her husband or in a secretive manner. The remaining stories in *Good Masters! Sweet Ladies!* (Schiltz, 2007) have female perspectives only in the stories that contain females, making 57% of the stories (n=20) "balanced." Many of the stories, however, are for single characters, and if it is regarding a male, there is no mention of females. With these exceptions, historical fiction has a female viewpoint in 76% of the stories (n=26) (the overall average of *Good Masters! Sweet Ladies!* was used instead of individual percentages). It appears that stories only lack a balancing female perspective if they lack the actual female characters. All other stories are able to convey strong females via one or more rebellious or valued character(s) (Figure 11).

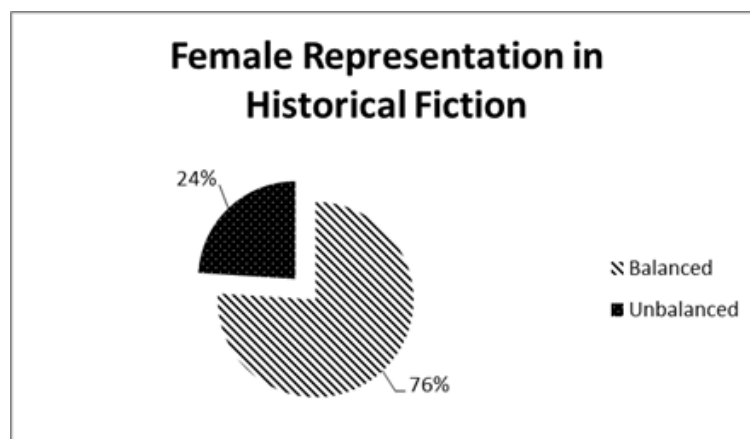


Figure 11

*Female representation in novels classified as historical fiction. Female representation and empowerment was very strong, even within historical fiction.*

## Discussion and Theories

In the *Hypotheses* section above, four hypotheses are introduced regarding the study of recent Newbery Medal-winning titles. None of the hypotheses are fully evidenced by the results.

### Hypothesis 1: Females will be depicted less often than males (at least one-third of the protagonists will be female).

The first hypothesis is incorrect as 48.6% of the protagonists are female (n=17) and the major (43.1% female, n=22) and minor (42.9% female, n=30) characters are also nearly equal in representation for both genders (see Figure 1). Females have a very strong representation in the Newbery Medal winners. The only area in which they lack representation is in the category of antagonist characters. This may indicate more about male stereotyping; however, the male antagonists are often depicted with traditional male behaviors, with negative connotations in society such as aggressiveness, arrogance or ignorance, and selfishness. Males have the traditional roles assigned to them, which can easily make them appear to be villains when they are all applied. In the more neutral or good character areas, the representation of genders is nearly equal.

### Hypothesis 2: The major female character(s) will be viewed as “odd” or as an “outsider” due to her/their behavior(s).

This hypothesis is incorrect. The strong female characters are supported 75% of the time (n=3) (Figure 10) in the stories or do not have peers around to pass judgment, as in many of the stories within *Good Masters! Sweet Ladies!* (Schiltz, 2007). Most often, the female has strong peers such as Abilene in *Moon Over Manifest* (Vanderpool, 2010) or Lucky in *The Higher Power of Lucky* (Patron, 2006). Both girls have friends with whom they go on adventures and speak their minds.

### Hypothesis 3: Males and females will more often appear in “traditional” gender roles in both attitudes and activities (females will cook and clean, males will build and fight, etc.).

While this is true for males at a ratio of 10:1 for traditional versus progressive roles, this is not true for females as they had a near 1:1 ratio in this area. Traditional male roles allow a character to be more powerful in his role as the traits include items which allow autonomy (i.e., independence, bravery, emotional stability). Therefore, these roles are merely transferred to females to create a new female archetype while allowing males to retain the same positive traits. In this manner, the story becomes more populated with strong characters as opposed to offsetting a strong female with a weak male. It is infrequent for any protagonist or major character to be weak. Minor characters more often offset the strength of the main characters such as Antoinette Tilling in *The Tale of Despereaux* (DiCamillo, 2003) or Ina in *A Year Down Yonder* (Peck, 2000). Characters in these recent Newbery winners are very active and therefore fall into the traditional male roles regardless of gender.

### Hypothesis 4: If the book is a work of historical fiction, there will be a greater gender bias in the form of lessened female empowerment or perspective.

Overall, this hypothesis does not apply to many of the works. Of the six works classified as historical fiction, 76% of the stories (n=26) contain a strong female role model or empowering female perspective (Figure 11). The stories that lack a substantial female view also lack actual female characters. In *Good Masters! Sweet Ladies!* (Schiltz, 2007), this is due to the form of the stories often being a monologue and with a singular character. However, in *A*



*Single Shard* (Park, 2001), the society is dominated by males. Stereotypical beliefs do not dramatically increase with historical fiction. Exactly 50% of the stereotypical beliefs (n=12) are voiced by characters in historical fiction, and 50% of the works examined (n=6) are classified as historical fiction. A majority of the literature contains strong females and characters who are accepting without challenge. This also relates to Hypothesis 2 as the characters are not viewed as outsiders in their own society, despite the different time or culture.

It should be noted that historical fiction stories remain true to their represented time period while still presenting strong feminine characters. Often, the novelists whose works this study examines take exception to the “rule” of subordinate females in the time period and create a new or similar character to fit the story. For example, in *Crispin: The Cross of Lead*, Avi (2002) bases the female bartender on an actual female revolutionary.

## Conclusion: The Real World

In recent Newbery Medal winners, females are not underrepresented and there is not a bias against the female gender. However, the works included in this study are biased toward traditional male representation. Genders are nearly equally represented as depicted in Figure 1. Female traditional roles and progressive roles are depicted at a 1:1 ratio while male traditional roles and progressive roles have a 10:1 ratio. This study supports the findings of Powell et al. (1998) and the idea that characters in Newbery Medal-winning works depict female gender more progressively than those in past decades. While these findings are heartening, the results of this study also suggest that bias against males continues. These findings suggest a need for future studies on how children’s literature depicts males and how males can critically interrogate such stereotypes.

Upon analyzing children’s literature for gender bias, librarians, teachers, and parents should by no means censor works that depict gender bias; rather, increasing children’s awareness of gender issues is critical. It is important to teach children that stereotypes exist in the world, and it is also important to teach children how to question them. Literature is a primary source of enculturation for children (Rice, 2002). The subconscious internalization of gender roles by children need not adhere to traditional structures. Enabling children to critically view what they read is a vital skill that can begin at any age and with any issue. This study presents opportunities for future research into gender depictions in literature. Moreover, the results suggest that librarians and teachers must continue to discuss issues of gender with children in Pennsylvania libraries and schools.

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## Appendix A: Reading List

1. 2011 Winner – Vanderpool, C. (2010). *Moon over manifest*. New York, NY: Random House Children's Books.
2. 2010 Winner – Stead, R. (2008). *When you reach me*. New York, NY: Random House Children's Books.
3. 2009 Winner – Gaiman, N. (2008). *The graveyard book*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Children's Books.
4. 2008 Winner – Schiltz, L. A. (2007). *Good masters! Sweet ladies! Voices from a medieval village*. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press.
5. 2007 Winner – Patron, S. (2006). *The higher power of Lucky*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster Children's Publishing Division.
6. 2006 Winner – Perkins, L. R. (2005). *Criss cross*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Children's Books.
7. 2005 Winner – Kadohata, C. (2003). *Kira-kira*. New York, NY: Atheneum Books for Young Readers.
8. 2004 Winner – DiCamillo, K. (2003). *The tale of Despereaux: Being the story of a mouse, a princess, some soup, and a spool of thread*. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press.
9. 2003 Winner – Avi. (2002). *Crispin: The cross of lead*. New York, NY: Hyperion Paperbacks for Children.
10. 2002 Winner – Park, L. A. (2001). *A single shard*. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Company.
11. 2001 Winner – Peck, R. (2000). *A year down yonder*. New York, NY: Scholastic.
12. 2000 Winner – Curtis, C. P. (2004). *Bud, not Buddy*. New York, NY: Dell-Laurel Leaf Books.

(Association for Library Service to Children, 2011)

## Appendix B: Definitions

- Antagonist – The character who opposes or conflicts with the protagonist. In this study, antagonists will only be counted if they are actual characters, not ideas or the protagonist's personality.
- Backdrop character – A character that is a bystander in the story and has little to no effect on the plot (e.g., crowds on market day).
- Bias – Prejudice in favor or against one group. Bias shall be determined to exist against females if they are underrepresented or are depicted in primarily traditional roles.
- Feminine – Having overall qualities specifically associated with females such as gentleness; usually associated with beauty as well. Females will be identified as feminine should they have multiple aspects of traditional female roles in their attitudes or actions without having any stand out as a defining characteristic.
- Historical fiction – A story with an accurate historical context (at least 30 years in the past) wherein the specific setting, events, persons, or customs of that time are essential to the plot.
- Major character – A character which is vital to the plot or resolution of the story.
- Masculine – Having overall qualities specifically associated with males including strength and aggressiveness; usually associated with a muscular appearance. Males will be identified as masculine should they have multiple aspects of traditional male roles in their attitudes or actions without having any stand out as a defining characteristic.
- Minor character – A character whose actions or presence help move the action forward in a story.
- Progressive role – A role which represents improvement in representing the genders equally in their abilities to be healthy and independent both physically and mentally.
- Protagonist – The main character within a story around whom the action centers.
- Stereotype – A standardized and simplified conception of groups based on some prior assumptions. The literature reviewed in this paper will be determined to have stereotypes if the number of traditional roles outweighs progressive roles in a given character or story line.
- Traditional role – A role assumed by the sexes based on the established Western school of thought from previous customs and ideals that women must be feminine, submissive, and passive and that men must be masculine, dominant, and active.
- Underrepresentation – To suggest a lower amount than is actually present. In this case, a fair representation should be 50% for males and 50% for females in the categories of characters.

## Appendix C: Gender Coding Sheet

General Information about the book:

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Author: \_\_\_\_\_

Publisher: \_\_\_\_\_

Copyright date: \_\_\_\_\_

Question	Specific Examples within each work	Tally of Characters/ Instances	Tally of Characters/ Instances	Tally of Characters/ Instances	Tally of Characters/ Instances	Tally of Characters/ Instances	Tally of Characters/ Instances
What gender is the protagonist?		Male -	Female -	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
What gender is the antagonist?		Male -	Female -	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
How many major characters (excluding protagonist and antagonist) are male and how many are female?		Male -	Female -	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
How many minor characters are male and how many are female?		Male -	Female -	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Are the female characters portrayed as active or passive?		Protagonist -	Antagonist -	Active Major -	Passive Major -	Active Minor -	Passive Minor -
Are the male characters portrayed as active or passive?		Protagonist -	Antagonist -	Active Major -	Passive Major -	Active Minor -	Passive Minor -
Is female protagonist indoors or outdoors more often?		Indoors-	Outdoors-	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Are the female characters, at any time, in need of rescue or do they rescue another? (Possibly not applicable for all books.) How many instances of each?		Rescued -	Rescues- Another -	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

<b>Are the female characters depicted as nurturers?</b>		Protagonist -	Major -	Minor -	n/a	n/a	n/a
<b>How many stereotypical (traditional) male activities or behaviors do(es) the male characters engage in (includes occupation, if any)? List specific instances if necessary.</b>		Protagonist -	Antagonist -	Major-	Minor-	n/a	n/a
<b>How many progressive male roles/activities/ behaviors do(es) the male character(s) engage in (includes occupation, if any)? List specific instances if necessary.</b>		Protagonist -	Antagonist -	Major-	Minor-	n/a	n/a
<b>How many stereotypical (traditional) female activities or behaviors do(es) the female characters engage in (includes occupation, if any)? List specific instances if necessary.</b>		Protagonist -	Antagonist -	Major-	Minor-	n/a	n/a
<b>How many progressive female roles/activities/ behaviors do(es) the female character(s) engage in (includes occupation, if any)? List specific instances if necessary.</b>		Protagonist -	Antagonist -	Major-	Minor-	n/a	n/a



<b>How many instances occur in which characters reveal stereotypical beliefs regarding the genders?</b>		Males about Females -	Males about males-	Females about males-	Females about females-	n/a	n/a
<b>Answer only if major female character is considered "strong": Is the female character rejected by her peers for being "odd" or "different"?</b>		Yes -	No -	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
<b>Is the novel considered historical fiction?</b>		Yes -	No -	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
<b>Answer only if novel is historical fiction: Did the novel have "balancing" female empowerment with accurate historical depictions?</b>		Yes -	No -	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a