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Caldecott-Winning Children's Books and the Women's Rights Movement of the 1960s

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Caldecott-Winning Children's Books and the Women's Rights Movement of the 1960s

by

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Abstract

This research consists of a content analysis of Caldecott-winning children's books. It explores the portrayal of the female gender before and after the Women's Rights Movement. A qualitative approach was used to investigate the portrayal of four randomly selected Caldecott-winning children's books. The research findings indicate that children's books published prior to the Women's Rights Movement include more gender-based stereotypes than those published after this movement. Female characterization, illustrations, and literary themes are all important factors contributing to the overall portrayal of the female gender in these books. The research findings are significant for educators, parents, and librarians, who should all be aware of the effects that poor representation of females can have on the development of children.

Keywords: children's books, Caldecott-winning books, gender inequality, reading instruction, women's rights, gender stereotypes

Dedication

To the next generation,

"A feminist is anyone who recognizes the equality and full humanity of women and men." —Gloria Steinem

"Both men and women should feel free to be sensitive. Both men and women should feel free to be strong." —Emma Watson

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The power of the written word is one that can neither be ignored nor underestimated. Books, poetry, news articles, and speeches have the potential to influence people's thoughts. It is through the written word that information, ideas, and accounts of important events can be recorded and shared. By publishing books, one has the power to mold the minds of present and past generations.

Often an underappreciated genre, children's picture books have all of this potential and more. As children engage with picture books, they are exposed to models and images that portray who these young readers can be now as well as who they could become as adults (Crisp & Hiller, 2011). Children's literature can therefore profoundly influence young readers' perspectives of the world and all its inhabitants. "There can be no doubt that the characters portrayed in children's literature mold a child's conception of socially accepted roles and values and indicate how males and females are supposed to act" (Kortenhaus & Demarest, 1993, p. 220). From reading these books, children form perspectives that influence their career aspirations, attitudes about roles in society, and personality characteristics that will carry over into adulthood.

The socialization process, which begins during childhood, includes the development of certain behavioral roles in children, many of which involve gender identity. Kortenhaus and Demarest point out that "in most cultures the most important and effective way of transmitting values and attitudes is through story telling, and in literate cultures this process includes children's books" (1993, p. 220). Therefore, parents, educators, and librarians should expose children to books containing themes,

characters, and stories that promote the development of healthy, well-rounded societal roles.

Many researchers have investigated the facets of gender representation in children's books. By investigating aspects such as the roles of characters or the number of times males and females appear in the illustrations, researchers have revealed new insights regarding the treatment of females in these books. Mainstream American culture reinforces a binary construction for the male and female gender, and this construction is reflected in children's literature (Crisp & Hiller, 2011). However, a perspective that is popular or accepted by some people does not mean that all people subscribe to it. A critical examination of the representation of gender roles in children's literature is necessary to ensure that the messages children perceive reflect reality rather than stereotypical attitudes.

Caldecott-Award Winning Books

Some research on the way females were represented in children's books has focused on Caldecott Award-winning works. The Caldecott Award is by far the most prestigious award for American children's picture books (Crisp & Hiller, 2011). As a result of their popularity, these books can be easily found in many libraries and classrooms across the country. In fact, "any self-respecting U.S. library that caters to children will be sure to get the medal winners that year, no matter how tight the budget is otherwise" (Clark, 1992, p. 6). The popularity and prestige of Caldecott Award-winning books makes them more likely to influence children than other children's books.

The Caldecott Medal is awarded to one artist per year by the Children's Service Committee of the American Library Association. While there are a number of awards

given to children's books by the American Library Association, the Caldecott Medal is unique because it highlights the achievements of illustrators rather than authors. This aspect makes Caldecott Award-winning books influential not only for what they *say* to readers but also for what they *show*. According to the American Library Association (n.d.), the idea of awarding the Caldecott Medal originated in 1937 when Frederic G. Melcher recommended establishing this award. His idea for instituting this medal reflected the beliefs of many people who felt that picture book artists deserved an honor similar to the one authors of children's books received. The idea was accepted, and the medal was named in honor of Randolph J. Caldecott, a nineteenth-century English illustrator. The award is given only to citizens or residents of the United States, and the illustrator does not have to be the author of the book (American Library Association, n.d.). In addition to the singular work selected for this award each year, the committee cites a number of books worthy of recognition as "honor books." These books are considered to be runners-up for the award.

There are number of reasons that researchers of children's literature use Caldecott Award-winning books to conduct studies. First, researchers frequently want to explore these books as a result of their influence on children. Second, they can usually find these books easily for every year of the award's existence. In addition, Caldecott Award-winning books are commonly considered examples of the best children's literature during a given year. These books also reflect the social trends of a given year (Kortenhaus & Demarest, 1993).

When looking critically at the books awarded the Caldecott Medal, it is crucial to examine not only the content but also the creators of these books. Crisp and Hiller (2011)

did just this in their analysis of Caldecott Medal-winning picture books. In this study, they examined books from 1938 to 2011—the most recent medal recipient at the time. When they conducted their study, there were 74 medal-winning books and 79 authors of these books. Of these authors, they identified 35 (44%) as female and 44 (56%) as male (Crisp & Hiller, 2011).

When divided into decades, the ratios of male to female authors fluctuate. Interestingly, only during the 1960s did female authors outnumber male authors with a staggering 8:3 ratio. On an even more intriguing note, the gender gap continued to increase as the award continued into the 21st century. In the 2000s, 8 males and 2 females were awarded the Caldecott Medal. This trend has continued into the 2010s as well with only one female author so far. When one considers the male to female ratios of illustrators as well as authors, it is apparent that each decade following the creation of the award has included more male than female recipients (Crisp & Hiller, 2011). While the these statistics are interesting to understanding the history of this award, moving beyond quantitative data is necessary to focus on the content of these books and the ways male and female characters were portrayed in these books.

The 1960s and Societal Change

Near the middle of the 1900s, a number of activist movements took place. For example, during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, minority groups demanded more rights for themselves. This movement was a defining event and led to conversations about the impact of this movement. These conversations led to research on the many ways that the Civil Rights Movement transformed the lives of minority group members.

Inspired by the Civil Rights Movement, feminist groups launched the Women's Rights Movement near the same time period—making the 1960s a decade known for activists' call for change in American society. In fact, part of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibited discrimination in employment on the basis of gender (Gemberling, 2014). Similar to the abolitionist movement of the nineteenth century, the Civil Rights Movement inspired the women of the middle class to start their own organized movement for improved rights in society. However, this was not the first time a women's movement occurred; such an event also happened during the nineteenth century. For this reason, the Women's Rights Movement of the nineteenth century is sometimes referred to as "the first-wave of feminism" and the one of the 1960s as "the second-wave of feminism" (Gemberling, 2014). Susan B. Anthony contributed literary work to the first Women's Rights Movement like Betty Friedan did for the second Women's Rights Movement. The literature associated with this movement questioned the idea that it was a woman's purpose to marry and bear children. Many women found that this questioning sparked a need for change in the expectations of women in society (Gemberling, 2014).

Despite the unquestionable importance of the Women's Rights Movement of the 1960s, there was little literature on how this movement changed children's literature. This study helped to fill the gap in this conversation. Thus, the research question for this study was the following: Did the Women's Rights Movement of the 1960s influence gender portrayal in children's books that were published after this event?

Literature Review

The role of children's literature within society did not become a serious topic of discussion until the 1970s (Berry & Wilkins, 2017). Prior to this time, little to no research

existed on how children's literature influenced children's understanding of gender roles. One of the first in-depth studies on this topic appeared in the *American Journal of Sociology* in 1972. The title of this study was *Sex Role Socialization in Picture Books for Preschool Children,* by Weitzman, Eifler, Hokada, and Ross (1972). This research sparked a conversation that led to a number of subsequent studies.

This increased interest in this topic is reflected by the broadness of studies available today—most of which reference the 1972 study. For many researchers, the questions at hand involved whether or not children's books contain gender-based biases, and whether or not the biases discussed in the 1972 study continued to exist in more recent books.

Berry and Wilkins (2017) found that biased gender roles in children's books shaped the expectations children have for themselves and others. Books provided some perspectives that helped children to learn about the world in a way that they could never have learned by first-hand experience alone. For this reason, when children's books reinforced gender biases in society, children often came to see these stereotypes as normal (Berry & Wilkins, 2017).

The study conducted by Berry and Wilkins examined gender-role depictions of central characters that are anthropomorphized inanimate objects. The focus on inanimate objects as characters, rather than human characters, in this study led researchers to realize many underlying messages that were often ignored by parents, teachers, and other caregivers. For example, parents may have provided their child with a book about cars. This book could have very well contained blatantly sexist messages, but because the characters are cars rather than humans, the parents may have overlooked these messages.

They might have chosen to give their child a book about cars simply because the child was interested in cars. Unfortunately, children are just as susceptible to these messages whether they are delivered in a story about two cars or a story about a boy and a girl. Consequently, their young minds begin to think of the "right" and "wrong" ways that males and females should behave.

These messages have serious implications for children's understandings of their abilities, aptitudes, and status in society (Berry & Wilkins, 2017). For example, when male characters are always depicted as having higher status than female characters, it leads to the perception of women as inferior or inept beings. In fact, research has shown that there are common gender specific descriptions that apply to male and female characters. Words such as "proud, big, great, fierce, and furious" were often used to describe male characters while words like "weak, frightened, sweet, and beautiful" were commonly used when referring to female characters. The stark contrast of these descriptors revealed a serious gap in characterization.

The differing descriptors for male and female characters made up only one aspect of gender bias. Berry and Wilkins found that male characters in children's books were not as frequently rejected as female characters were but that they were often portrayed as leaders and unifiers. In contrast, female characters were found to stereotypically gain satisfaction from giving or serving others while male characters tended to exhibit confidence and leadership qualities. In addition, female characters often lacked the same qualities of male characters and also lacked the basic right of identity that was granted to their male counterparts. In this study, female characters were more often shown without faces than male characters (47% to 4%).

This lack of face depersonalized the female characters in these books. Further, this depersonalization of female characters led to a diminishing of their individuality altogether. Repeatedly representing a person in a way that diminishes their individuality led to a perspective that this person was disposable or replaceable. Such a perspective led children to believe that the person overall is of little to no value. The findings of Berry and Wilkins revealed the tendency of children's books to portray messages about the insignificance of women's voices.

In a similar study, Crisp and Hiller (2011) analyzed Caldecott Award-winning books for signs of gender discrimination or bias. In this study, gender stereotypes showed the established, problematic constructions that embolden boys with a sense of privilege while simultaneously disheartening girls with lowered self-esteem and expectations (Crisp & Hiller, 2011).

According to a content analysis by Dr. Frank Taylor, there were three stances commonly taken on the issue of children's literature and gender stereotypes: that they are only books, that these portrayals are a thing of the past, or that these books simply reflect reality. Taylor rebutted each of these views with statements substantiated by research. Regarding the first perspective—that they are only books—Taylor mentioned that children attain concepts of self and personality at the same time they read these books. Further, the messages these books developed are not isolated to children's literature; children's toys, the mass media, and even clothing encourage them.

The second perspective presented—that these portrayals are a thing of the past— is problematic as well. Taylor pointed out that a strong discord exists between stereotypical, domestic roles assumed by women in books and the reality of modern,

professional women. The progress that has been made regarding women in the professional world contradicts the existence of the underlying prejudices still present in recent children's books.

The third perspective, that these books are simply reflecting reality, is quite possibly the most problematic of the three points of view discussed by Taylor. This statement encourages the view that people cannot do anything about societal inequalities. Studies show that gender is conceivably the most rudimentary dimension through which people understand the social world and their place in it. There is oftentimes a lack of accuracy, let alone diversity, in children's books. "If language does in fact shape and condition our perceptions of reality, then parents who desire equality for their daughters or egalitarianism for their sons ought to look more closely at what their children are reading" (Taylor, 2003, p. 306).

Similar to Taylor, Narahara (1998) emphasized the harmful consequences of gender stereotypes in children's books—specifically children's picture books. This study revealed that by age four, the majority of girls realized that their primary role was housekeeping and that the boy's felt their role was earning money (Narahara, 1998). These young minds did not come to this conclusion on their own. Young children are inundated daily with information—both through language and imagery—that influence the formation of gender roles, and books contribute to a large portion of this material (Narahara, 1998).

Narahara noted that gender-biased children's literature is primarily a product of the 20th century. Children's literature in the 19th century focused primarily on childhood, family, and country. Expectations for boys and girls were the same, and the messages in

these stories tended to be similar for both sexes. Books written specifically for boys began to increase at the end of the 19th century and on into 20th century and provided literature that addressed gender appropriate behavior (Narahara, 1998).

These books underrepresented females in titles, central roles, and main characters at a ratio of 1:11 (Narahara, 1998). Inequalities in occupation roles were also apparent. Males held higher status than women. And books described females as passive, submissive, and trapped while male characters were described as leaders, autonomous, and dynamic (Narahara, 1998). This trend contributed to the perception that "boys do" and "girls are."

These stereotypes are still present in children's literature. Children who have not yet established a solid identity are especially vulnerable to these toxic messages. However, children are just as responsive to non-sexist literature as they are to gender-biased literature. According to Narahara (1998), "children also developed less stereotyped attitudes about jobs after being read stories about people who fought sex-discrimination" (p. 6).

The fact that children's views on gendered roles in society can be swayed so significantly by the type of literature they are exposed to cannot be ignored. Kortenhaus and Demarest (1993) spoke about this point in their study, *Gender Role Stereotyping in Children's Literature: An Update*. These authors pointed out that books have a profound influence on the socialization process of young children. Even in an age of mass media saturation, television programs fail to match the impact of books on children (Kortenhaus & Demarest, 1993). Given how influential books are, it is evident that the characters in children's books have the power to mold a child's original views of normative social

roles and behaviors for men and women. This means that children's books have the power to change the harmful gender identity formed by the collective beliefs upheld by their society.

The findings of the Kortenhaus and Demarest study revealed a new trend in the gender stereotyping of children's books since the 1960s. The study found that the representation of female characters in children's books *has* increased. However, this increase has not resulted in better portrayals of female characters (Kortenhaus and Demarest, 1993). While the increase in female representation in children's books should be praised, the depiction of the female characters needs to be addressed.

According to a review of research by Hani Morgan (2009), children's literature often fails to portray the female gender equally to the male. Teaching young children to develop a respectful attitude towards those who are different is crucial (Morgan, 2009). And children's books can be used as a practical and powerful tool for this purpose. Since children's books can develop appreciation or lack of respect for people from different backgrounds, educators need to take the appropriate steps in response to the sexism that still exists in these resources to this day (Davis & McDaniel, 1999).

Method of Research

As discussed previously, this research focused on whether the Women's Rights Movement of the 1960s influenced gender portrayal in Caldecott-winning books. In order to analyze the messages some of these books promote, a content analysis was a valid approach for this project. When conducting a content analysis, there are several ways for acquiring data, including a quantitative approach and a qualitative approach. Many studies on children's literature use a quantitative approach as this type of approach

usually makes it easy to measure and collect data. However, I used a qualitative approach to answer my research question because this method was one of the best ways to investigate context dependent meaning.

When using a qualitative approach to conduct a content analysis, there are three specific approaches that are conventionally used: conventional, directed, or summative (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Each of these approaches involves interpreting meaning from the content of a studied text. According to Hsieh and Shannon (2005), the biggest differences between these three approaches are the coding schemes, origins of codes, and threats to trustworthiness. Usually in qualitative content analysis, coding groupings result straight from the text data. A directed approach, however, begins with a theory that serves as direction for initial codes. And a summative content analysis contains counting and comparisons—typically of keywords or content—followed by the interpretation of the primary context (Hseih & Shannon, 2005).

For my research project, I used a blend of the conventional and summative approaches. My research focused on the overall context of Caldecott-winning books before and after the Women's Rights Movement. The books I selected were analyzed for overall feel. I included passages that supported my findings. I read each book cover-to-cover to get a feel of the book and its overall message. While reading each book, I focused on one main question: Does this book portray the female gender well? Illustrations and descriptions of female characters were considered along with the ways different characters interacted with female characters.

Content Analysis

Madeline's Rescue by Ludwig Bemelmans is the Caldecott Award winner for the year 1954. This book is part of a six-book series that has been popular since the first book's publication in 1939. The main character, Madeline, is a spirited seven-year-old girl who is attending boarding school in Paris with eleven other little girls. Despite being the smallest of the group, Madeline is afraid of very little. In this part of the book series, Madeline takes a tumble into the river while on a walk with Miss Clavel and her schoolmates. Young Madeline is rescued by a brave stray dog that the girls adopt and name Genevieve. However, at the annual school inspection, Genevieve is tossed out due to the rule that there are "no dogs allowed in school" (Bemelmans, 1954, p. 24). Miss Clavel and the girls frantically search the city for their beloved canine friend. Their search ends unsuccessfully, but Genevieve finds her way back to the school later that night. Reunited, the girls, Miss Clavel, and Madeline are happy once again.

The character of Madeline represents a paradox involving the female gender. She is small, yet fearless. She loves the outdoors and frightens Miss Clavel with her rambunctious behavior. This characterization makes Madeline an engaging, unique protagonist. Madeline's major character traits also contradict stereotypical female gender roles. While the illustrations show that all of the other little girls are walking in neat, straight lines, Madeline is shown here and there—never where she is supposed to be. Madeline's rambunctious behavior is the reason for her fall into the river, and Miss Clavel makes sure to communicate this to Madeline once they are safely home (Bemelmans, 1954, p. 12).

A running theme of Madeline's rescue conveys the expectation for perfection in female characters—specifically perfection concerning one's outward appearance. This theme is reinforced by both the text and illustrations. At the opening of the story, the twelve little girls leave their boarding school "in two straight lines" (Bemelmans, 1953, p. 1). This description portrays the societal conformity to polished appearances of the female gender. In addition, the illustration on this same page shows exactly how pristine the little girls appear to the outside world.

Another major event of the story that substantiates the expectation of little girls to appear perfect and polished is the inspection. The text states that this inspection was an annual occurrence, conducted by the board of trustees (Bemelmans, 1953). Interestingly, the board is comprised of both male and female characters. This heterogeneous makeup provides a representation of how society as a *whole* judges—or inspects—the female gender. Not only does the institution of the inspection indicate the reality of societal expectations for young girls, but the girls' reactions to and preparations for this inspection reveal their conformity to this harsh reality. Illustrations on page 19 show the girls of Miss Clavel's school busy brushing their hair, straightening their bows, and shining their shoes. The girls are also pictured cleaning the rooms of their school. This reveals that not only are the girls themselves expected to be perfect but that their environments must also be so. In addition, the text states that this annual inspection caused "great sorrow" among the schoolgirls and their headmistress (Bemelmans, 1953, p. 21).

During the inspection, a rule is revealed stating that there are no dogs allowed in school. There is no justification given for this rule, and despite the pleas of the girls and

Miss Clavel, Genevieve is kicked out of the schoolhouse. This event is significant because the voices of these female characters go unacknowledged by authority figures. This deficiency of voice supports the idea that the only voice that matters is that of those in authority.

While much of the story reveals the accepted behaviors and expectations of this time period, there is a significant turning point, which occurs at the moment Miss Clavel tells her girls to wipe away their tears. "It's no use crying or talking. Let's get dressed and go out walking. The sooner we're ready, the sooner we'll leave—The sooner we'll find Miss Genevieve" (Bemelmans, 1953, p. 27). At this moment, Miss Clavel and the young girls abandon their previously assumed traditional roles and take up an attitude of activism. Gone are the two straight lines. The girls and Miss Clavel search high and low for their dear Genevieve. This shift is displayed mostly through the illustrations at this point in the story.

This turning point in the story reveals a reversal in a number of previously established themes in the story. First, the most prevalent theme, which involves the importance of one's appearance, is abandoned. This abandonment is portrayed by both the text and the illustrations. Further, the themes of routine and domesticity are likewise disregarded. Instead of twelve little girls calmly walking in two pristine, straight lines, readers now perceive them searching frantically all over the city. Gone is the order, routine, and perfect appearance that they once displayed.

The overall message of this story is mixed. A preference of loyalty over outward appearance temporarily takes place; however, once Genevieve returns, the girls go right back to their old routine. While a temporary disregard for the stereotypical gender-based

expectations of the 1950s takes place, a number of underlying messages from the story contradict this empowering theme. This contrast in themes accurately reflects the turmoil involving societal norms during this time period.

While the overall message of the story does not portray the female gender in a negative way, a few questions do arise from some parts in the text. During the inspection, as he throws Genevieve out into the street, the head of the board states, "it's a perfect disgrace for young ladies to embrace this creature of uncertain race!" (Bemelmans, 1953, p. 24). The words of this excerpt raise a number of questions both pertaining to race as well as gender. Is the issue the fact that young girls have a beloved pet or that this pet is of uncertain race? If they were not young ladies, would having a school pet be acceptable? In the same token, if Genevieve were not a stray, would having a school pet then be acceptable? Neither of these questions receives a definite answer from the story; however, the fact that these questions arise calls into question the impact that such a statement has on young female readers.

Frog Went A-Courtin' by John Langstaff is actually an old Scottish children's tune that Langstaff adapted into a book, which became a Caldecott-Medal winner in 1956. This story/song tells the story of Mr. Frog and Miss Mouse. At the start of the story, Mr. Frog calls on Miss Mouse at her home. There she sits, working at her spinning wheel. In fact, Miss Mouse's exact words are, "I sit to spin," implying that this activity is her purpose in life. This statement supports both the dominant and underlying themes of this story—the dominance of masculinity and the expectations of domesticity toward female characters.

Regarding the major themes of dominant masculinity, other excerpts from the text as well as illustrations should be considered. When Mr. Frog asks Miss Mouse to marry him, Miss Mouse tells him that, "without (her) Uncle Rat's consent, (she) would not marry the president" (Langstaff, 1955, p. 6). Despite Miss Mouse's high esteem of her uncle's opinion, all he is interested in is for the wedding plans and expenses to be taken care of before giving his consent. No questions involving Mr. Frog's character or Miss Mouse's happiness are raised.

Male dominance is portrayed in not only the text but also the illustrations. On the first page of the story, Mr. Frog leaves his house with a sword and pistol on his hip. This visual represents an underlying message that male dominance is tied to an understanding of violence. Why else should Mr. Frog be taking not one but *two* weapons with him to go courting? In addition, Uncle Rat is illustrated as a large and imposing figure. His body takes up the entire doorframe of Miss Mouse's house, and he stands a whole head taller than both Miss Mouse and Mr. Frog (Langstaff, 1955, p. 12).

Not only is the theme of male dominance prominent through the text and the illustrations, but the underlying presence of domestic stereotypes is also apparent. The first image of Miss Mouse in this text shows her sitting at a spinning wheel. There are no objects shown in Miss Mouse's home that do not serve some type of domestic role. The objects shown in her home include a spinning wheel, a chair, a watering can, and potted plants.

In addition to Miss Mouse's domesticated surroundings, her actions further substantiate her expected domestic role as a female. First, the first two pages of Miss Mouse's illustration show her sitting. This establishes a norm of *passivity*, while Mr. Frog

displays *activity* by mounting and riding his horse all the way to Miss Mouse's home on the previous pages. On page 12, Miss Mouse is also shown bowing as her uncle gives his blessing to her marriage; however, Mr. Frog is making eye contact with Uncle Rat in this same scene. This illustration in particular depicts the two previously discussed themes of this story.

The Funny Little Woman is a Japanese folktale retold by Mosel. This book was published in 1972 and was awarded the 1973 Caldecott medal. This tale tells the story of a funny little woman. This is the only name given to her. The funny little woman is said to love making rice dumplings (Mosel, 1972). This activity is all that she does day after day; however, one day she loses a dumpling to a hole in the ground. Desperate to retrieve her dumpling, the woman falls down this hole herself. This event takes her on a perilous journey, which she ultimately survives—successfully returning to her home to make and sell rice dumplings for the rest of her days. She eventually becomes the richest woman in all of Japan.

In *The Funny Little Woman*, the character of this woman reflects contradictory traits. Initially, she is portrayed as a woman who loves to laugh and make rice dumplings all day. From the illustrations, one can see that the funny little woman's house is small, simple, and only contains domestic objects used for making dumplings.

As the story progresses, however, the funny little woman shows a combination of bravery and perseverance that leads to her ultimate victory at the conclusion of this riveting tale. First, when the woman falls after her dumpling, she shows little to no regard for her ominous surroundings. As she passes by mangled roots and treacherous rocks, she steadily calls out, "My dumpling! My dumpling! Where is my dumpling?" (Mosel, 1972,

p. 7). The little woman also fails to heed the warnings given to her by seemingly wiser male authorities. When a very stern *Jizo*, a male god, warns her of the "wicked *oni"* that live in the caverns, the little woman simply laughs and continues her search for the lost dumpling. This encounter displays the contrast between male and female characters in this tale, both physically and characteristically. The funny little woman is also the only female character, so far, in this story.

Despite the woman's disregard for the *Jizos'* warning, they still protect her when an *oni* approaches. On page 12, a *Jizo* says to the funny little woman, "hurry and hide behind me for here comes a wicked *oni*" (Mosel, 1972, p. 12). Despite this dangerous event, the funny little woman begins laughing as the *oni* speak with the *Jizo*. This repetitive indifference to a dangerous condition sends a message to readers that approaching unknown situations without fear can have serious consequences. In the funny little woman's case, these consequences were both positive and negative.

When the "wicked *oni*" discovers the funny little woman, he literally carries her back to his home. The *oni* declares to the *Jizo*, "I'm going to take her home and have her cook for all of us" (Mosel, 1972, p. 16). This quote indicates the *oni's* intention to make the funny little woman a domestic slave. He takes possession of her as if she is nothing of significance. This disregard for females is the reason the *oni* are considered to be so wicked. This wickedness truly becomes a gender issue when it is revealed that all of the *oni* are male.

The fact that the male *oni* expect the funny little woman to cook for them reinforces negative gender stereotypes; however, the fact that the actions of the *oni* are seen as wicked reveals an awareness that these stereotypes are unjust. This awareness for

a need for justice is further supported by the following events of the story. While the funny little woman was initially content to cook dumplings for the *oni*, she eventually begins to miss her home. The illustrations throughout her time in captivity show the funny little woman underground and her house above ground. As the story progresses, the seasons around the funny little woman's house change—showing the passage of time. After quite some time in captivity, the funny little woman sneaks out of the *oni's* compound late at night—taking with her the magic paddle she was made to use when cooking dumplings for the wicked *oni*. By doing so, the funny little woman reclaims her freedom and gains a resource that transforms her life forever. In addition, her demeanor is likewise transformed from bold to cautious. This conversion illustrates the lasting effects of oppression—specifically patriarchal oppression.

Unfortunately for her, the funny little woman's escape from *oni* captivity is not an easy one. When the *oni* discover that she is missing, they chase after her. However, she has already taken off in their boat. As the *oni* make their chase after the woman, she never looks back. All of the illustrations show the funny little woman looking forward. Despite not being able to physically stop the funny little woman, the *oni* still find an indirect way to stop her. This tyranny, while secondary, is just as detrimental to the woman as forcibly taking her back to captivity. This indirect barrier instills such fear in the woman that she *cannot* laugh. One of the only two character traits given to the funny little woman ceases to exist thanks to the actions of the *oni*.

Despite the *oni's* efforts to stop the woman, she persists in her effort to escape. As she trudges onward, "her feet stuck in the mud, her hands stuck in the mud, and she fell in the mud!" (Mosel, 1972, p. 30). This progression of hindrance to the woman's freedom

reflects similar struggles that so many women had experienced at the time this story was published. The fact that this story is a retelling of an old Japanese folktale implies that this situation has been an issue for a significant amount of time. In addition, the *oni* find humor in the woman's struggle. They begin to laugh which causes a distraction that allows her to make her final escape. The *oni's* flippancy shows their underestimation of her ability to escape. This error in judgment reflects similar underestimations of the female gender throughout history.

Regardless of her struggles, the funny little woman escapes from captivity and returns home with the magic paddle. With this new resource, the woman turns her passion for making dumplings into a business. She sells rice dumplings to people from across the land and becomes the richest woman in Japan. This result sends an encouraging message to young readers—especially female readers. The funny little woman learned from her struggles and channeled that knowledge into a successful business. This story is therefore encouraging and also empowering.

Beatrice Schenk De Regniers' *May I Bring A Friend?* was published in 1964— right in the middle of the Civil and Women's Rights Movements. It was awarded the Caldecott Medal in 1965. This story communicates a theme of inclusivity. The main character of this story, a little boy, remains unnamed—as do the king and queen. While the queen is the only female character in this story, she and the king act and speak as one. The story begins when the boy receives a note from the king and queen inviting him to "their house" (Schenk, 1964, p. 1). The boy was not invited to "the castle" but rather "their house." This terminology instills a tone of humility and hospitality. The boy replies

and asks if he may bring a friend with him to dinner. The king and queen respond by saying, "Any friend of our friend is welcome here" (Schenk, 1964, p. 2).

The little boy shows up to dinner with a giraffe, but the king and queen do not bat an eye. The next page shows the king, queen, boy, and giraffe seated around the dinner table—with them all smiling. No matter the shape or size of the little boy's friends, the king and queen are welcoming to all. And each time the boy asks to bring a friend, the king and queen respond with warm regards. They even go so far as to say, "the more friends you bring the better" (Schenk, 1964, p. 14). Eventually, the king and queen go ahead and tell the boy he can bring a friend before he has the chance to ask. In their invitation on page 26, they say, "'And we want you to know', said the queen and king, 'you can bring any friends you would like to bring'" (Schenk, 1964, p. 26). When the little boy brings his friend, the elephant, the king and queen do not disapprove even though the elephant cannot sit at their dinner table; instead, they adapt their plans to include the little boy's friend and have a picnic together on his back. At the end of the story, the little boy's friends return the king and queen's hospitality with an invitation of their own. The king and queen accept and have afternoon tea at the city zoo.

Conclusion

Upon examination of these four Caldecott-winning books, the conclusion can be drawn that children's books published after the Women's Rights Movement of the 1960s are more sensitive to the portrayal of the female gender than those published prior to this movement.

Both *Madeline's Rescue* and *Frog Went A-Courtin'* were published prior to the Women's Rights Movement of the 1960s. These books both contain a strong undertone

of a female's "rightful place"—especially regarding authority figures. While *Madeline's Rescue* briefly celebrates female characters taking action against an injustice, *Frog Went A-Courtin'* represents female characters as little more than domestic beings. The perspective that the female gender should fulfill a domestic role is detrimental to the social development of young children—both male and female.

In contrast, both *The Funny Little Woman* and *May I Bring a Friend?* communicate themes of equality and inclusivity. However, these stories accomplish this communication in different ways. While *The Funny Little Woman* describes unjust actions and an oppressed woman's triumphant escape from captivity, *May I Bring a Friend?* gives readers an example of hospitable, inclusive behavior. The moral of the story for *May I Bring a Friend?* can be easily applied to real life—intentionally include anyone no matter their shape or size and treat them with kindness. Likewise, *The Funny Little Woman* teaches readers that turning a passion into a business is possible and that there is a season for everything. While circumstances may seem dire for a time, the chance to rise will come. Both stories portray the female gender in a positive way.

These findings indicate that teachers, parents, and librarians should be aware of the messages portrayed in each of these books and make efforts to expose their children to books that do not contain sexist or gender-stereotyped messages. This awareness would benefit the development of social skills and self-identity in young readers. It would also be interesting to see how the female gender is portrayed in children's books written in the 21st century versus the 20th century. Given the opportunity to broaden this study, I would incorporate a larger pool of selected books for analysis. I believe the findings from this study would be further substantiated through additional research.

My study showed that the Women's Rights Movement of the 1960s had an effect on the way the female gender is portrayed in children's books. The books I selected to analyze that were published before the Women's Rights Movement included themes of male dominance, expectations for perfection in female characters, and expectations for domesticity in female characters. The books I selected to analyze that were published after the Women's Rights Movement included themes of inclusion, rising above adversity, and using one's passion to create a successful life. This difference between two randomly selected works published before the Women's Rights Movement and two published after suggests that a similar difference would be found in a larger pool of children's books.

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