

**VILLAINS, HEROES, AND PARENTS:
AN EXAMINATION OF GENDER STEREOTYPES AND
REPRESENTATION OF FEMALE CHARACTERS
IN CANADIAN AWARD-WINNING CHILDREN'S BOOKS**

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Emma Kristensen
Prof. Paulette Rothbauer &
Dr. Lynne (E.F.) McKechnie

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An Examination of Gender Stereotypes and Representation of Female Characters in Canadian Award-Winning Children's Books

Children's books can teach children many things, including how they see gender. Dating back forty years, researchers have found that children's books can teach children that one gender matters more than the other (Fong, Mullin, & Mar, 2015; Hamilton, Anderson, Broaddus, & Young, 2006; Hughes & Seta, 2003; Weitzman, Eifler, Hokada, and Ross, 1972). Because of the important role books play in children's perceptions of gender, the present study examines the content of a sample of recent award-winning Canadian children's books for gender stereotyping and representation. In award winners and children's choice books, males and females are stereotyped as villains, protagonists, and parents, and these depictions are used to explore important topics.

BACKGROUND

Gender representation in children's books has been well researched, starting in the 1970's. The study of Weitzman et al. (1972) was one of the first to examine female representation in children's literature, in an examination of characters in prize-winning picture books that pioneered research in this area. They found that females are under-represented in titles, central roles, and illustrations by a 1:11 ratio compared to males. Hamilton et al. (2006) used Weitzman et al.'s survey method to study 200 children's picture books published between 1995 and 2001. In this study, the male to female ratio of title characters, main characters, and

in pictures was poor, between 1.5:1 and 1.8:1. Female main characters are passive, and more likely to be rescued and nurtured than male characters. The authors noted more male main and title characters, and that males are shown more often in pictures. McCleary and Widdersheim (2014) did not replicate these results in their study of 12 Newbery Medal winners from 2000-2011, but found equal depictions of major and minor characters of both genders. Nisse (2008) examined gender, diversity, family structure, and socioeconomic status in a sample of all Newbery Medal winners, noting an increase in female characters as publication year progressed.

There is ample evidence that gender stereotyping is found in many aspects of children's fiction. Crabb and Marciano (2011) lend a unique perspective to the subject by examining the relationship between gender and use of production artifacts in picture books, in a follow up to Crabb and Bielawski's 1994 study. The more recent study supported the 1994 findings, as females are depicted working at home using household artifacts, and males outside using production artifacts.

Crabb and Bielawski's 1994 study was again replicated by Poarch and Monk-Turner (2001), but using 22 non-award winning easy to read books, and by Dionne (2009), in the only Canadian study to explore gender representation in children's book illustrations. Poarch and Monk-Turner found that males are almost twice as likely to be shown with a production and personal artifact, and that they are not shown in household activities. Females are depicted using a household artifact far more than males, and when females use production artifacts, it is as a teacher or in a leisure activity. Dionne also found that females accounted for less than a third of characters, and are under-represented in pictures, except for in household artifact use, and actually found a decrease in the depiction of males in household activities over two decades.

Studies about gender representation in children's books often choose a sample from award winners, because they are theoretically the best books, and also accessible and widely read. Hamilton et al. (2006) conducted one of the only studies to look at both award-winning and bestselling children's books. They found only a slight difference in the degree of female underrepresentation in Caldecott winners compared to non-Caldecott winners, which suggests that award winners may be able to represent all children's books. Paynter (2011) updated this study with a sample of 48 bestselling children's books, but disagreed with Hamilton et al., arguing that the results are not applicable to all children's books because not all children's books are award winners. Despite this, Newbery Award and Caldecott Medal winners remain popular samples for children's literature studies.

The picture book is the most common type of children's book that is studied for gender stereotyping, by analyzing the titles, pictures, central and supporting characters, occupations, and activities. Hamilton et al. (2006) explored character behaviour, settings, and personality. The authors found that sexism manifested in more subtle ways in picture books, in visual sexism, including posture difference. Crabb and Marciano (2011) also found visual sexism in the depiction of the types of material cultural artifacts used in picture books.

There is evidence of a more latent form of gender stereotyping, in occupations. Hamilton et al. (2006) found that occupations are gender stereotyped, and male characters are almost twice as likely to be employed than female characters, and continue to have fewer occupational choices. Crabb and Marciano (2011) compared occupational representations to the division of labour at the time of a book's publication, and found the representation mirrored the real division of labour, but that it did not keep up with labour trends.

Some authors took a different approach to analysis of gender stereotyping in children's literature. Tepper and Cassidy (1999) studied the use of emotional language, and Turner-Bowker (1996) investigated the use of *differential language*, which is the words to describe males and females.

Author gender may play a role in how genders are represented. In a study of 200 children's picture books, Hamilton et al. (2006) found that only male authors caused under-representation of female characters, and that women write about both sexes equally. The gender of the author may also have bearing on the type of the character they create. To study how male and female authors develop male protagonists, Meuchel (1999) analyzed five high fantasy books by each gender. Male authors developed personality and friendships for protagonists, whereas female authors described protagonists' physical appearance and love interests. However, in a study of 30 Caldecott Medal and honour books, in which Turner-Bowker (1996) found that both male and female authors gender stereotype in their descriptions of character behaviour and attributes.

Over forty years ago, Weitzman et al. (1972) argued that a lack of female characters in picture books teaches children that girls matter less than boys. More recently, this topic has been examined in the field of psychology, in studies about the effects of gender stereotyping in children's books. The studies conclude that children's fiction has the power to promote positive gender representations, or cement gender stereotyping (Fong, Mullin, & Mar, 2015; Hughes & Seta, 2003).

Few studies look at gender stereotyping in Canadian, as opposed to American, children's literature, and a comparatively small number of studies have looked at novels for

older children, rather than at picture books for younger children. The present study therefore continues and updates the research by Hamilton et al. (2006) by examining whether gender stereotyping is significant in Canadian middle grade fiction. This will also be considered separately for specific types of characters: villains, heroes, and parents.

METHODS

Sample population

This study examines the extent to which 23 recent ‘Silver Birch Award’ and ‘Canadian Library Association (CLA) Book of the Year for Children Award’-winning books contain gender stereotyping. Critics’ choice award winners and children’s choice award winners were examined to ensure both popular and award-winning titles are included in the sample. See *Appendix A* for a list of the 23 books in the sample.

Sampling method

The middle grade core audience is defined as 8 to 12-year-olds, or students in Grade 3-6. For the purposes of this study, “middle grade books” are defined as books with a reading grade that includes 3, 4, 5 or 6. The recommended range for the book must intersect this study range. I included anything which was inclusive of the relevant range even if the designated range is actually wider (e.g. 10 – 14 years). Four books were excluded. The study sample includes ten historical realism novels, eight contemporary fantasy novels, four contemporary realism novels, and one historical fantasy novel.

Content Analysis Method

This study uses qualitative and quantitative content analysis. Major and minor characters were counted, and protagonists and antagonists were examined separately. Backdrop characters were included if they provided an alternate viewpoint to the norm. The specific variables examined include:

- Progressive and traditional traits, roles, and activities represented by the genders,
- Representation of males and females in each category of characters (protagonist, antagonist, and parent),
- Stereotypical beliefs held by the characters regarding the same and opposite gender,
- Gender depictions and the depictions of other important topics in works of historical fiction,
- Representations of males and females as active or passive, aggressive or nurturing, brave or fearful, and rescuing or being in need of rescue,
- Representations of males and females as protective, problem solving, and leading,
- Strong female role models being accepted or rejected by society, peers, or characters.

The main questions pertaining to stereotyped behaviours of females compared to males draw from Hamilton et al.'s survey method (2006), which analyzed how often characters were portrayed as active or passive, found indoors or outdoors, rescuing or being rescued by another character, were nurturing or being nurtured, and acting aggressively or assertively. The current sample was also examined for depictions of bravery, fear, protectiveness, problem solving, leadership, and the treatment of strong female characters. See *Appendix B* for definitions of key terms.

Stereotyping of these roles is analyzed using an adjective list based on Best (2003), where an international group of researchers surveyed 9,000 people from 32 countries, including children and adults, about gender stereotypes in their country.

All characters were coded for gender, occupation, and race. Gender was coded through inferences from names and pronouns, and race was coded if explicitly named, or if it could be deduced from cultural practices. Characters were coded for these depictions if they interacted directly with another character, or if they were mentioned for a reason, such as depicting a non-Caucasian or non-heterosexual character to show readers a variety of experiences. Similar behaviours or traits were coded as one type of depiction, to identify themes and trends. Regarding strong female characters being accepted or rejected, it included being viewed as a leader, exclusion from a social group, having her ideas or beliefs accepted or rejected, or having her authority followed or ignored.

RESULTS

In the sample of twenty-three books, thirteen authors are female, and ten are male. There are twelve female and twelve male protagonists. One of the books has two protagonists, for a total of twenty-four protagonists in the sample. This suggests that awards are fairly evenly awarded with respect to protagonist and author gender. The majority of main characters' families are dual-parent (n=15), and have adequate means, because the primary needs of food, clothing, and shelter are met (n=9). Families are also depicted as single-parent (n=5) and poor (n=6), because they are going hungry or homeless; or comfortable (n=6), because they have more than what is needed. Some families fall outside of this norm, because a relative raises one main

character, three are orphans, and three families are wealthy. The wide range of structures and socioeconomic statuses of main characters' families reflect the variety found today in Canadian society.

The books were examined for how they explore an important topic. Eight historical books explore fifteen topics, whereas only two modern books explore two topics. The sample has fifteen male villains, and five female villains, a ratio of 3:1. Women are strongly underrepresented as villains, and when women are depicted as antagonists, they are more stereotyped than men, as emotionally aggressive, acting for someone else, and because they are given reasons for their villainy. Significant gender stereotyping is observed in the depiction of parents in weakened states, that is absent, sick, and dead parents. Comparing the sample historical and modern books, there are also gender differences between the treatment of mothers and fathers.

Analysis of the sample shows that villains, protagonists, and parents are all gender stereotyped, and the three types of characters are used to explore important topics like sexism and racism. In the sample, protagonists are stereotyped because most are depicted progressively for their gender most of the time; parents are stereotyped as absent, sick, or dead; and antagonists are stereotyped in their villainous traits. These portrayals are different in historical and modern settings, and have different functions in both settings.

Progressive Protagonists and Exploration of Social Issues

The sample shows that protagonists are stereotyped because they are depicted progressively for their gender most of the time. All historical books use progressive traits in main characters to explore important topics (n=10). The use of children's books to explore past events is well

known, and previous studies have examined how depictions in historical children's fiction affect our understanding today. Parlevliet (2016) analyzed how children identify with contemporary views of negative parts of history in picture books. The author found that child protagonists act as mediators between past and present, by creating familiarity and alienation with the past. Familiarity is achieved by examining important topics through current ideas, and alienation, through an unfamiliar setting. The study also showed that novels where the protagonist's worldview is different to the contemporary reader create a more lasting impression. Librarians believe books can be used to engage in social justice. In a textual professional development session, Seidel and Rokne (2011) proposed a selection of picture books for engaging social justice with children, such as promoting the development of historical consciousness. The authors grouped the books into themes, topics, and experiences relevant to children's lives.

Historical books in the sample have traditional and progressive protagonists who help readers explore an important issue. Almost all of the historical protagonists have equal numbers of progressive and traditional traits. In historical settings, female protagonists are brave, logical leaders who actively solve problems, who are also nurturing, protective, and emotional. Male protagonists are nurturing and sensitive, and often start the story as fearful and passive, but become brave and active. The combination of action and emotional traits give protagonists the agency they need to explore an important issue, and the emotional intelligence to understand the issue. This is shown in the books through examinations of racism, poverty, sexism, death of parents, alcoholism, slavery, animal testing, physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, physical and mental illness, and prejudice against mental illness and disability.

This depiction can be compared to modern settings, where only two progressive/traditional protagonists explore an important issue (*Undergrounders*, *The Reluctant Journal of Henry K. Larsen*). Instead, modern books are progressive in their depictions of villains and heroes, but they do not explore a social issue. The progressive modern hero fights an antagonist. Such characters are depicted equally as both genders.

Although protagonists are progressive in historical books, their antagonists are traditional males who force characters into traditional gender norms. This is not found in modern books, where villains are progressive and do not force the hero into traditional roles. In historical books, all of the antagonists fit traditional male gender norms, as they are aggressive, abusive, and domineering. The men act this way towards family members and acquaintances of both genders and various ages, which reiterates that anyone can be a victim. Two of the male antagonists are physically abusive towards family members, but convince themselves that they are being caring, which is a realistic depiction of abuse (*Watching Jimmy*, *Johnny Kellock Died Today*). In fact, only two historical antagonists, the Night Gardener (*The Night Gardener*) and Officer Schmidt (*Making Bombs for Hitler*), are depicted progressively as well as traditionally, as they are shown to be passive, nurturing, or refined.

The traditional male villain also enforces gender stereotypes, as they force protagonists into traditional gender roles, either directly, or through circumstances they create. Female protagonists are forced to nurture, placed in passive situations, and subjected to traditional beliefs, such as women cannot farm (*The Crazy Man*). This occasionally happens to male protagonists. For example, a male protagonist is taught to be stoic about sexual abuse by his male abuser (*Boy O'Boy*).

The sample has exceptions to the male villain themes, where the male villain causes the protagonist to be progressive, or does not enforce gender norms. For example, a male villain creates the circumstances where a female protagonist must nurture, but also where she gains agency to support herself (*The Third Eye*).

Depicting social issues in a historical setting shows children the injustices faced by each gender in the past, because traditionally, women are seen as weak victims, and men as aggressive bullies. Understanding this allows children to extrapolate how the depictions are still active today, furthering their understanding of gender and society.

Modern settings contain protagonists that are more progressive than traditional. All male protagonists (n=3) and 66% of females (n=8) in modern settings have mostly progressive traits, but few of the modern books use the progressive protagonist to explore an important issue (n=2), which implies that children's books are not a place to explore current societal injustices. Instead, actual people are the antagonists.

In both time periods, villains create the hero by opposing them and giving them a chance to escape a passive situation, and gain agency. This allows the hero to be heroic. However, modern villains do not have preconceptions about the hero based on their gender, and do not force them into traditional gender roles, like their historical counterparts. This accounts for the high percentage of progressive traits in male and female characters in books with modern settings, compared to those with historical settings. This could also reiterate that modern settings are not places to explore injustices, perhaps because they align too closely with modern politics.

Weakened Parents

This study finds that parents in the sample of middle grade books are stereotyped in their depictions in weakened states. The books were analyzed for depictions of parents of major characters. Because the characters are all children, the expected baseline would be dual parents. A weakened state is defined by an absent, sick, or dead parent.

About 15% of parents are sick in all of the books, and there is no difference between historical and modern. In historical books, there are **no** sick fathers, and 30% of mothers are sick, whereas in modern books, 25% of fathers are sick, compared to 6% of mothers. This can be attributed to stereotyping, because amongst all parents, there is no difference in their depiction as sick. The trend from historical to modern says that a large proportion of mothers are sick in the historical setting, and it reverses so that there is far more fathers sick in the modern setting.

In the sample historical books, the trend is that parents are more often absent in modern books, because 25% of all parents are absent, compared to 34% of parents being absent in the modern books. In terms of gender, in both historical (3:2) and modern (4:3) books, the percent of absent fathers is greater than the percent of absent mothers. This is stereotyping, because in all cases, the fathers tend to be absent more than the mothers.

Overall, there are twice as many dead parents in historical books compared to modern books (25:13). Within genders, there are more dead mothers than fathers in both modern (19:6) and historical (30:20) books. As is the other two cases of weakened parents, this shows significant gender stereotyping.

These counts differ from the socioeconomic and family status counts, because those do not take into account more complex variables, like sickness, which means a parent can have a dual parent family but be counted as absent, sick, or dead.

In historical books, the genders are stereotyped in this depiction, as authors present fathers' absences from their children as a choice or something that they are forced to do, and mothers' absences as necessitated by illness or death. This means absence from their child's life is an active decision for male characters, but passive for female characters, and also reinforces a stereotype of nurturing mothers. This may also reflect the idea that historically and traditionally mothers were in charge of childcare. However, there is one exception. In *The Night Gardener*, although the main character's parents are dead, she is heavily involved with two parents who are placed in a passive situation by a magical object, because the surrogate parents' energy and happiness is slowly seeped away. Constance, the mother is depicted as sick for most of the book, and Bertrand, the father, is nurturing, but becomes distant when near the magical object.

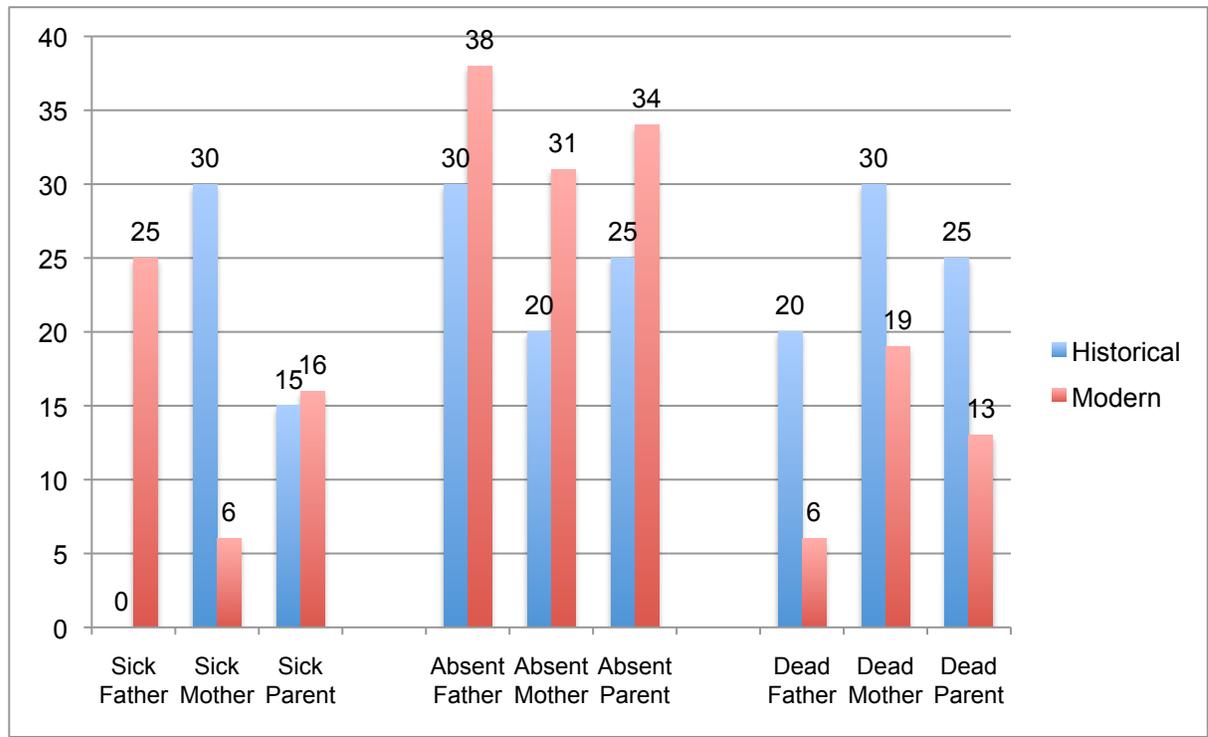


Figure 1

Depiction of sick, absent, and dead parents by gender and historical/modern setting.

A major function of the parent character is to show gender roles of a certain time period, and this is done differently in past and present. Sick parents in general cause males and females to become less progressive because of the family roles they are expected to step into, but there are also differences between the time periods. A sick, absent, or dead parent can allow the historical protagonist to explore an important topic. For example, an absent father in *The Crazy Man* means that Emmaline and her mother are subjected to prejudice, and they are also powerless to protect their mentally disabled farm aid from prejudice. This allowed the author to depict the prejudice that existed in the 1900s, which gives children the chance to reflect on how this prejudice still exists today. Modern books use sick, absent, or dead parents to make a point about family structure, rather than highlight prejudice, which may be to depict the variety of families in Canada, to provide a relatable depiction for Canadian children. A major difference in these depictions is that men and women can both nurture, showing progressive family roles. For example, a father takes on the main caretaker role because his wife is absent due to depression (*The Reluctant Journal of Henry K. Larsen*).

This depiction causes protagonists to be both more progressive and more traditional, because males and females in both time periods are put in a passive situation, and forced to become active, brave, or independent. For example, an absent father forces a female hero to live with her grandmother, causing her to become more independent (*The Whole Truth*). This allows the characters to gain agency on their own, without the help of both parents. In historical books, it is more common for females to be put in a passive situation by a lack of dual

parents, whereas in modern books, this situation causes both genders go on adventures and solve problems. This shows gender stereotyping in historical books. For example, a mentally ill father subjects a girl to the wrath of her evil stepmother, which causes her to go on an adventure to find her mother (*The Third Eye*).

In both time periods, females are forced to nurture because of non-dual parents, and this trend is not found in males. This is more common in historical books, evidenced by six female protagonists forced to nurture compared to two in modern books. This suggests that a later time period has more progressive depictions of female protagonists in terms of nurturing, and may also show that women were expected to nurture in the past. For example, a female protagonist must take care of her mentally disabled cousin when her aunt gets sick (*Watching Jimmy*). This type of depiction was only found in one male character, which shows stereotyping in how others treat female protagonists, and expect them to act when a parent is incapacitated.

Villains

Children's books often tell the story of a hero, and according to Fahraeus and Yakali-Camoglu (2011), this hero cannot exist without some form of opponent. In the sample, opponents are depicted in a variety of forms, ranging from a physically abusive family member (*Watching Jimmy*), to a witch (*Curse of the Dream Witch*), to an opposing force, like the Nazis in *Making Bombs for Hitler*. The opponent causes a problem, and the protagonist becomes the hero by overcoming the opponent and resolving order.

Arenas (2011) suggests examining villains' personalities using McCrae and Costa's system of traits, the NEO personality trait inventory (NEO PI-R), because it is accessible and applicable. In this model, personality is divided into to five core personality traits: neuroticism,

extroversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. According to Arenas, Western villains have low levels of agreeableness, which is a person's willingness to trust others. This trait inventory allows for exact and exhaustive analysis, because each core trait is further divided. Archetyped villains in Western culture lack trust, straightforwardness, altruism, compliance, modesty, and tender-mindedness.

First, villains can be examined for the archetype, by analyzing the character for the absence of the core traits. Although common characteristics exist, villains who deviate "...from the stereotype in relation to core characteristics point to realistic and complex villains, who at times, may show pity, or trust, or admiration towards the hero, or remorse." (Arenas, 2011) Therefore, villains will be stereotyped if they show high counts of these traits. Second, to provide another variant in the villain archetype, the cause of the villainy can be analyzed using Kelley's covariant model, an attribution theory examining reasons for a person's behaviour. This model studies the reasons for villainy, and explores the possibility of mitigating factors (a direct response to given stimulus that justifies it; a way of acting which is being influenced by a set of circumstances; or a manifestation of the villain's personal dispositions), by analyzing the cause of the actions for consensus, consistency, and distinctiveness (Arenas, 2011).

Archetypes and stereotypes are based on traits. My working distinction between the two is that the author actively creates an archetype, and a stereotype is passively applied to certain groups. Building on Deborah Best's (2003) description of gender stereotypes, a stereotype will be described as "psychological traits and behaviours that are believed to occur with differential frequency in two groups." G.C. Jung (1959/1971) describes an archetype as a pre-existing idea that is recognized, not acquired through personal acquisition. An archetype

will be differentiated from a stereotype in that it does not change with time, and it is more widely recognized throughout the world.

Antagonists are stereotyped as villains, because they are expected to be men. This was found to be the case for all historical villains (n=8). The sample has 15 male villains, and 5 female villains, a ratio of 3:1. Women are underrepresented as villains, and when women are depicted as antagonists, they are more stereotyped than men, as emotionally aggressive and acting for someone else, and because they are given reasons for their villainy.

White and O'Brien (1999) interviewed 590 kindergarteners to Grade 12 students about their ideas of heroes, and found that the students identified with people who demonstrate moral excellence. This suggests that heroes can be used to teach moral behaviour, which is supported by the abundance of progressive protagonists that explore important issues. It stands to reason that antagonists, therefore, indirectly create the heroes that children identify with, because they create the circumstances that allow the heroes to be heroic.

The antagonists in the sample have practical, plot-based functions, as well as roles in the arcs of the main character. They help the protagonists escape passive situations and gain agency, which allows them to be heroic and improve their moral behaviour. For example, Olivia becomes stronger (*Curse of the Dream Witch*), Cat matures (*The Secret of Grim Hill*), and Newton becomes confident (*Newton and the Giant*). That there is a function common to many villains shows there is a villain stereotype in children's books, but analysis shows that it is not gender stereotyped, as it is used for antagonists of both genders. However, it suggests a trend of simplified character portrayals, as it relies on common traits, which loses the

opportunity for the story and reader to explore the complex range of emotions and reasons for villainy that can be found in villains.

Men and women are equally strong villains, but female villains are given excuses for their aggression towards children, whereas this is less common for male villains, which implies that aggression is innate in men. Analysis of the villains for villainy showed that both genders have the same number of villainous traits on average (5.2).

The sample suggests that female villains may be more progressive villains than males, because they have more mitigating factors for villainy (women show an average of 2 factors compared to 1.27 in men). This indicates that the reason for a woman's villainy, and their character aside from villainy, is explored more than in male villains. This theory is supported by the analysis of male villains, as over half of the male villains show no mitigating factors at all (n=8). An alternative theory for the high numbers of mitigating factors in female villains, which is further supported by the low number of female villains, is that villainy is out of the norm for women, and they need an excuse to act aggressively or villainous towards children, whereas this is not required for male villains. This implies again that aggression is natural for men; a theory supported by the high number of male villains. The two reasons for these trends indicate the gender stereotyping of villains.

Female villains are also stereotyped in the type of abuse they use, and their role as leaders of villainy. In both modern and historical books, male villains abuse physically and emotionally, whereas a female villain's aggression manifests through emotions, specifically, in emotional abuse and fake nurturing. 80% of female villains (n=4) show this stereotyping with 2-3 of these traits, and 73% of male villains (n=11). Female villains (40%) are also more

truthfully nurturing than male villains (13%). For example, Uncle Ezra is physically dominant, threatening, and violent towards the other characters (*Johnny Kellock Died Today*), and Uncle Ted causes brain damage to his brother, and leers at the female protagonist (*Watching Jimmy*). On the other hand, the Dream Witch pretends to nurture her victims (*Curse of the Dream Witch*). Female villains are further stereotyped in their role as leaders of villainy, because 60% of female villains provide the circumstances for male villains to be evil (n=3), whereas only 7% of male villains provide the circumstances for a female villain to be evil (n=1). An example of this is Kali working for Zarku (*The Third Eye*).

There are exceptions to this portrayal, because the abuse trait is not entirely limited to men. Two mothers are depicted as bullying to children (*The Third Eye, The Whole Truth*), and one male villain is depicted as calculating, as opposed to the norm of physically or emotionally abusive (*Wolf Pack*).

In modern books, there is stereotyping in the gender of the antagonist and protagonist, and how their villainy causes the protagonist to act. Female villains only antagonize female protagonists, which suggests that women cannot terrorize men. Although the female villains cause female protagonists to act progressively by bringing about action, 80% of female villains also cause the female protagonist to nurture (n=4). This trend was also found in female protagonists with a male villain. In the modern and historical samples, 40% of female protagonists were forced to nurture because of actions by villains of both genders (n=10). This is only found in 13% of male protagonists (n=3). For example, the Dream Witch's actions cause Olivia to meet a boy who provides her the chance to flee her confinement in the castle and save her kingdom, but she also causes her to worry and care for her family (*Curse of the Dream*

Witch). This is a concerning depiction how women in positions of power effect children, and the gendered expectations of female heroes.

The low number of female villains, and high number of mitigating factors they have, suggests that women are not taken seriously as villains, and that women are not thought to be innately evil, which is a gender stereotype.

The main function of male and female antagonists in historical books is to enforce or demonstrate a prejudice or negative situation, allowing the protagonist to explore the important issue. This is a more complex function than what is found in modern books, as only two male modern villains are used to show injustices. Historical antagonists demonstrate a complex injustice found silently in society. For example, a male antagonist is used to depict the sexist attitude that existed in 1940s Canada (*Last Chance Bay*). This antagonist's function is most often used for female characters, which could be because women are marginalized throughout history. Modern books, on the other hand, portray antagonists as male and female villains who act as a threat to the main character, which forces them to be progressive, active, and brave.

CONCLUSIONS

Hamilton et al. (2006) found that popular books, as well as award winners, underrepresented females as title and main characters, and in illustrations, and that characters were gender stereotyped in terms of occupation and traits. The authors hypothesize that society does not value women or feminine qualities, because books about traditional and nontraditional girls are not as popular as books about boys. This study supports the findings

that women are gender stereotyped in children's books, but also finds that men are gender stereotyped.

The present study also shows that there is gender stereotyping in a new category of books: Canadian books for older children, and that gender stereotyping exists in children's choice and regular award winners. This is new because previous studies focused on American award winners for younger children.

The present study highlights that historical children's books explore important topics using progressive characters and gender stereotyping. The active, emotional protagonists have the agency to explore an important issue, and the emotional intelligence to understand it. The books explore a variety of important topics, including racism, sexism, and abuse. The absence of this type of exploration in modern books could suggest that children's books are not a welcome place to explore injustices, perhaps because they align too closely with modern politics. However, depicting important issues in a historical setting shows children the injustices faced by each gender in the past, and understanding this allows children to extrapolate how the depictions are still active today, furthering their understanding of gender and society.

The results show that it is equally important to assess children's books for a balanced depiction of gender roles for boys **and** girls, because both genders are stereotyped. However, boys and girls have strong gender role models in Canadian middle grade protagonists, and stories set in the past provide particularly consistent representations of strong, progressive protagonists who also explore important topics.

The stereotyping of parents and antagonists highlights the need for thoughtful examination and discussion of children's books for gender depiction. Analysis of the

antagonists shows that a “strong “ character can be stereotyped in role and by gender, showing the importance not to assume that a character with stereotypically strong traits is progressive. Rather, depictions should be carefully examined for stereotyping. The depiction of parents provides the opportunity to discuss the varying nature of Canadian families and to examine the roles each family member plays, and the analysis of parents shows that both genders are stereotyped in this role. Finally, these findings suggest a need for continuing study of gender depictions in Canadian books for younger children and young adults.

Parents, teachers, and librarians can selectively choose books with balanced depictions of gender roles and traits, until authors and publishers provide a more balanced depiction. Children’s fiction has the power to promote positive gender representations, or cement gender stereotyping, because children learn from gender depictions, and fictional stories have the power to dictate beliefs about gender. This is not to suggest that books with a gender bias should be censored, but rather they can be used as points for discussion to teach children about stereotyping and other gender issues.

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Appendix A: Reading List

Silver Birch Award

1. 2015 Winner – Auxier, J. (2014). *The night gardener*. New York, NY: Amulet Books.
2. 2014 Winner – Stevenson, R. (2013). *Record breaker*. Victoria, BC: Orca Book Publishers.
3. 2013 Winner – Skrypuch, M. F. (2012). *Making bombs for Hitler*. Toronto, ON: Scholastic Canada.
4. 2012 Winner – Skuy, D. (2011). *Undergrounders*. Toronto, ON: Scholastic Canada.
5. 2011 Winner – Sylvester, K. (2010). *Neil Flambé and the Marco Polo murders*. Toronto, ON: Key Porter Books.
6. 2010 Winner – Weston, R. P. (2008). *Zorgamazoo*. New York, NY: Razorbill.
7. 2009 Winner – Narsimhan, M. (2007). *The third eye*. Toronto, ON: Dundurn Group.
8. 2008 Winner – DeMeulemeester, L. (2007). *The secret of grim hill*. Montreal, ON: Lobster Press.
9. 2007 Winner – Falcone, L. M. (2005). *Walking with the dead*. Toronto, ON: Kids Can Press.
10. 2006 Winner – Van Belkom, E. (2004). *Wolfpack*. Toronto, ON: Tundra Books.
11. 2005 Winner – Stewart, S. (2003). *Raven quest*. Toronto, ON: Scholastic Canada.
12. 2004 Winner – McGowan, M. (2003). *Newton and the giant*. Toronto, ON: HarperTrophy Canada.

CLA Book of the Year for Children Award

13. 2014 Winner – Stratton, A. (2013). *Curse of the dream witch*. Toronto, ON: Scholastic Canada.
14. 2013 Winner – Nielsen, S. (2012). *The reluctant journal of Henry K. Larsen*. Toronto, ON: Tundra Books.
15. 2012 Winner – Pearson, K. (2011). *The whole truth*. Toronto, ON: HarperCollins Publishers.
16. 2011 Winner – Oppel, K. (2010). *Half brother*. New York, NY: Scholastic Press.
17. 2010 Winner – Hartry, N. (2009). *Watching Jimmy*. Toronto, ON: Tundra Books.

18. 2009 Winner – Carter, A. L. (2008). *The shepherd's granddaughter*. Toronto, ON: Groundwood Books.
19. 2008 Winner – Curtis, C. P. (2007). *Elijah of Buxton*. New York, NY: Scholastic Press.
20. 2007 Winner – Dyer, H. (2006). *Johnny Kellock died today*. Toronto, ON: HarperTrophyCanada.
21. 2006 Winner – Porter, P. (2005). *The crazy man*. Toronto, ON: Groundwood Books.
22. 2005 Winner – Carter, A. (2004). *Last chance bay*. Toronto, ON: Penguin Canada.
23. 2004 Winner – Doyle, B. (2003). *Boy O'Boy*. Toronto, ON: Douglas & McIntyre.

Appendix B: Definitions

- **Antagonist (also “Villain”)** – The character who opposes or conflicts with the protagonist.
- **Archetype** - A pre-existing idea that is actively created by an author, maintained with time, and more widely recognized throughout the world.
- **Contemporary fiction** – A story set in modern times.
- **Family structure** - Dual parent (two parents), single parent (only father or mother present), guardian by a relative, guardian by a non-relative, orphan (no parents), and no guardian (protagonist lives on their own with no knowledge from the story if parents/guardians are alive or existent).
- **Female** - A single character or a group of characters that are identified as female by themselves or the reader.
- **Historical fiction** – A story with an accurate historical context (at least 20 years in the past) wherein the specific setting, events, persons, or customs of that time are essential to the plot.
- **Leading** - A character that provides guidance to or leads others.
- **Major character** – A character who plays a significant part in the story’s action.
- **Male** - A single character or a group of characters that are identified as male by themselves or the reader.
- **Occupation** - A job done by a character employed outside of the home.

- **Problem solving** - A character that works towards solving a problem, either his or her own problem or another character's problem.
- **Progressive role** – A role which represents improvement in representing the genders equally
- **Protagonist (also “Main character” and “Hero”)** – The main character within a story around whom the action centers.
- **Socioeconomic status** - Poor will be having meager means, for example, going hungry or being homeless because of financial means. Adequate will be having sufficient means for primary needs, including food, clothing, and shelter. Comfortable will be having more than what is needed for everyday needs. Wealthy will be having an abundance of means.
- **Stereotype** - Psychological traits and behaviours that are believed to occur with differential frequency in two groups, passively applied to a certain group, and changing over time.
- **Strong female character**- A female character who is independent, and who others look up to and wish to imitate, including physical strength, strength of will, and strength of mind.
- **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.