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Stereotyped Portrayal of the Elderly in Picture Books

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STEREOTYPED PORTRAYAL OF THE
ELDERLY IN PICTURE BOOKS

A Research Paper
Presented to the
Faculty of the Library Science Department

In Partial Fulfillment
of the requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

Studies have found that minorities have been portrayed in a stereotyped image in children's picture books. Since the elderly have been considered a minority group, this study examined the portrayal of the elderly in picture books to determine if a stereotyped image is present. Content analysis was performed on thirty-three books. A worksheet was devised which contained the four main categories main character, function or role, physical appearance, and personality descriptors. Sub-categories for each main category were also provided on the worksheet. Frequency of occurrence for each category or sub-category was then recorded on the worksheet. After the analysis was completed, a composite tally was made. Figures indicated that the elderly were portrayed as a main character in 86 percent of the books analyzed. This high percentage was believed to have been present because of the use of an analytic picture book index. Figures also indicated that a stereotyped image of the elderly is present in picture books for each of the three main categories function or role, physical appearance and personality descriptors.

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, much attention has been focused on the elderly. Advancements in educational and medical technologies have increased life expectancies which have helped produce a society with one tenth of its entire population being persons 65 years and older. The latest census figures show the population of those people 65 years and older to be 21,815,000.¹

Along with this increase have come significant changes in our society which bring about changes in attitudes toward old people. With the gradual shift of the social structure from a predominantly agricultural to an industrial society came a trend toward a more youth-oriented society. The elders became more of a burden to their children rather than an important part of the family. Each member of the family structure became more independent, and the number of old people living with their children rapidly declined. In her book about the aged, Field ^{said} ~~says~~ that "although there is an increasing number of multigenerational families, there is a steadily decreasing number of multigenerational households."²

Because of the separation of the generations, many of the prevailing images in our society have stereotyped the aged negatively, stressing disability and incompetence. It

¹U. S. Bureau of the Census, Statistical Abstract of the U. S., (96th edition) Washington, D. C., 1975. p. 532.

²Minna Field, The Aged, the Family, and the Community, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), p. v.

is this stereotyped image that the elderly resent and would like to change. Margaret Kuhn, chairman of the Gray Panthers Organization, has this to say about the elderly:

Our decade is witnessing the rise of a whole new generation of elders. We live longer. We're more vigorous physically. We're better educated and more articulate. And consciousness-raising has made us aware of how our society puts us down.³

Experts have regarded the elderly as having many of the criteria of a minority group, some of which are "negative stereotypes, residential segregation, discrimination, and the development of a unique subculture."⁴ Studies have been conducted to determine if children's literature presents an honest portrayal of other minority groups such as blacks and females. Most of these studies found that those portrayals were not accurate. A sample of these studies is discussed in the literature review.

Hickey's opinion seems to be indicative of other behavioral scientists in that attitudes and stereotypes internalized by children during their early years are maintained, with little modification, throughout their life span.⁵ They feel that it is partly through books that the image is formed. Because many materials which contain stereotyped

³Margaret E. Kuhn, "Liberation from Agism" (Indiana: Gray Panthers Organization, 1974), p. 3. (Mimeographed.)

⁴Beth B. Hess, "Stereotypes of the Aged," Journal of Communication, 24, No. 4 (1974), 77.

⁵Tom Hickey, Louise Hickey, and Richard Kalish, "Children's Perceptions of the Elderly," Journal of Genetic Psychology, 112, (1968), 227.

images are found in school media centers, the media specialist should become aware of the texts and illustrations of books that contain biased portrayals.

The intent of this study, therefore, was to examine the portrayal of the elderly in children's picture books to determine if the stereotyped image is present. The researcher examined the following questions:

1. Through the text and illustrations of the picture books, how often are the elderly portrayed as a main character?
2. Through the text and illustrations of picture books, how are the elderly portrayed in functions or roles, physical appearance and personality descriptors?

Based on the findings of a study done by Ansello,⁶ the following hypotheses were used:

1. The elderly will be portrayed as a main character in 75% or more of the books analyzed.
2. Through functions or roles, physical appearance and personality, the elderly will be portrayed in a stereotyped image in the books analyzed.

From the outcome of the analysis done for this study, the researcher hopes that media specialists will become aware of the portrayal of the aged in children's picture books. In doing so, they may help the child recognize the stereotype so that he may formulate his own unbiased opinion.

⁶Edward F. Ansello, "Ageism in Picture Books: How Older People Are Stereotyped," Interracial Books for Children Bulletin, 7 No. 6 (1976) 5.

To give the reader a better understanding of the context of terminology, definitions of terms used throughout this study are given.

A definition of stereotype given by Seltzer and Atchley⁷ was used for this study: "Stereotypes are sets of beliefs which purport to describe typical members of a category of people or ideas. These beliefs are acted upon as if they were true, regardless of the empirical facts."

Another term defined is picture books. The A. L. A. Glossary of Library Terms defines picture books as "A book consisting wholly or chiefly of pictures, adapted to the interests and needs of younger children."⁸ No indication of age was given, but School Library Journal⁹ classifies them for use by preschool children through third grade. For the purpose of this study, picture books referred to books consisting mostly of pictures for use of children at preschool age through the third grade.

Although several sources were consulted, a definition for the terms elderly or aged was available in only a few. A definition was given more by inference of age rather than by listing characteristics which apply to age. Phrases such as "life after 60" or "65 and older" are examples of

⁷Mildred Seltzer and Robert Atchley, "The Concept of Old: Changing Attitudes and Stereotypes," Gerontologist, 11, (1971), 227.

⁸American Library Association, A.L.A. Glossary of Library Terms, (Chicago: American Library Association, 1963), p. 101.

⁹Bowker, School Library Journal, "The Book Review Section.

such definitions. The term retirement was often connoted with the aged, indicating that upon retirement, one becomes elderly. The Internal Revenue¹⁰ and the Social Security Administration¹¹ list 65 as the age limit for their programs for the aged, but mention no other requirements or characteristics which must be included. In conversation, the definition of age depends to a large extent on the age of the person discussing it.

Ginnow, in his encyclopedia of legal definitions, says of the aged:

The term as applied to human beings is not, for all purposes, susceptible of precise definition, nor is it practicable arbitrarily to fix a period of life at which the condition of being aged may be said to have certainly begun. While the word "aged" has been held to mean that the person to whom it is applied has reached that degree of weakness which characterizes declining years, the term may be applied to a person who is hale and hearty.¹²

Thus, it becomes clear that there is no fixed age at which one suddenly becomes old. For the purpose of this paper, an operational definition of aged refers to persons named in picture books as grandfather, grandmother, grandparents, old man, old woman or old people.

¹⁰U. S., Code of Federal Regulations, 26 CFR 1.121.

¹¹U. S., Code of Federal Regulations, 20 CFR 405.102.

¹²Arnold O. Ginnow, ed., Corpus Juris Secundum, 2A (Minnesota: West Publishing Co, 1972), 532.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

For a part of the literature review, the researcher investigated studies on other minority stereotyping in children's literature. Each of these studies dealt with the same concerns about stereotyping of minority groups. These concerns have to do with the dishonest portrayals of minorities both in the text and in the illustrations of children's books, the ^{small} few number of books available about each minority, and a concern for good selection and use by librarians and educators.

Katherine Baxter found that "Black people are described in ways that are stereotyped, reflective of the ignorance and paternalism that White people have traditionally shown toward Black people."¹³ Lenore Weitzman examined winners of the Caldecott Medal, an honor given by the Children's Service Committee of the American Library Association for the most distinguished picture book of the year. She found that females are portrayed unfairly and unevenly in children's books. Not one Caldecott book pictured a woman with a job or profession.¹⁴ A more recent study by Stewig and Knipfel revealed that 68 percent of the ^{picture} books

¹³Katherine B. Baxter, "Combating the Influence of Black Stereotypes in Children's Books," Reading Teacher, 51, No. 2 (1974), 540.

¹⁴Lenore J. Weitzman, "Sex-Role Socialization in Picture Books for Preschool Children," American Journal of Sociology, 77 No. 6 (1972), 1125.

showed the women in homemaking roles and only 32 percent showed women in professional roles.¹⁵ In a study by Stoodt and Ignizio, "not one of the seventy books reviewed could be selected as flawless in representation of the American Indian."¹⁶ The only dissenting finding was in a study by Gloria Blatt, which examined the portrayal of Mexican-Americans. She found that "children's literature gave a fair treatment of this cultural group."¹⁷ However, this study was conducted around 1966 and may not be a representative finding by more recent standards.

Another area of concern is the low percentage of books available about minority groups. Bingham found that "only forty-nine books containing black characters in the illustrations were recommended by popular booklists during a thirty-eight year period between 1930-1968."¹⁸ Studying more recent picture books as well, Baxter found that 99 percent of the book market excludes Blacks.¹⁹ In his study on sexism, Richard Wylle found that females were the main

¹⁵John W. Stewig and Mary L. Knipfel, "Sexism in Picture Books: What Progress," Elementary School Journal, 76 No. 6 (1975), 155.

¹⁶Barbara D. Stoodt and Sandra Ignizio, "The American Indian in Children's Literature," Language Arts, 53, No. 1 (1976), 17.

¹⁷Gloria T. Blatt, "The Mexican-American in Children's Literature," Elementary English, 45 No. 3 (1968), 450.

¹⁸Jane Bingham, "The Pictorial Treatment of Afro-Americans in Books for Young Children 1930-1968," Elementary English, 48 No. 6 (1971), 880.

¹⁹Baxter, Op. cit., p. 454.

character in only 22.7 percent of the books examined.²⁰

Falkenhagen examined picture books since 1965 with a Native American as a major character. The total number of books examined was only twenty-two.²¹ Blatt discovered that "writers commit the 'sin of omission' and should write more books about Mexican-Americans in the United States."²²

The last area of concern is for good selection and use by librarians and educators. Baxter suggested that a candid discussion with students about an author's bias would help students recognize the stereotype of a minority group. She also suggested having on hand as many "good, accurate non-stereotyped books as possible."²³ Wylle's study indicated a need for more careful screening for the sex-stereotyping in picture books."²⁴ Stewig and Knipfel concluded their study by saying that "a wider presentation of women's roles in picture books would undoubtedly give young children more realistic ideas of the career opportunities open to women today."²⁵ Falkenhagen stated that

²⁰Richard E. Wylle, "Sex Bias in Children's Books," Childhood Education, 52 No. 1 (1976), 221.

²¹Maria Falkenhagen, "The Treatment of Native Americans in Recent Children's Literature," Integrated Education, 11 No. 5 (1973), 58.

²²Blatt, op. cit., p. 450.

²³Baxter, op. cit., p. 453.

²⁴Wylle, op. cit., p. 222.

²⁵Stewig and Knipfel, op. cit., p. 155.

teachers cannot accept recent publication dates as a measure of fair and non-stereotypical books fictionalizing life of the Native American. She felt that a true and complete introduction to Native American history and culture would place stereotypes in proper perspective.²⁶

The following portion of the literature review will examine four studies in depth. The first two deal with children's perceptions of the elderly; the last two studies examine children's picture books for the portrayal of the elderly.

Hickey and others²⁷ conducted a study with 208 third graders in the Los Angeles area to explore reactions that children have toward the elderly. The subjects were from Catholic and non-Catholic, high and low income groups, with a mean age of eight years of age. They were asked to write an essay about an old person. The responses were grouped into two major categories: physical and social characteristics. The physical characteristics were most often found in ambulatory difficulties and feebleness. The social category showed that children perceived the elderly as kind or friendly three times as often as mean or unfriendly. Differences caused by economic status were more evident than those related to religion. The study suggested that some of the differences between the wealthy and the poor population

²⁶Falkenhagen, op. cit., p. 59.

²⁷Hickey, op. cit., pp. 227-235.

could be attributed to differing levels of conceptual ability and verbal learning, rather than differing perception. The findings also indicated that eight year old children are able to recognize the implication of the term "old age," and that they have already begun to develop concepts of what old age is and attitudes toward old people.²⁸

Thomas and Yamamoto researched attitudes toward age in school age children. A total of 1,000 subjects in grades five, seven, nine, and eleven in a midwestern state were used for the study.²⁹

Two data gathering devices were used: a story writing and a semantic differential. For story writing, three newspaper photographs were presented to the students. The pictures were of a young man, a middle aged man, and an old man. The subjects were to write a story about each person and also indicate the order in which the stories were written. Responses of the stories indicated that age estimates were sharply focused which suggested that by grade five, children have developed the perceptual and reasoning skills to arrive at consensual measurement. Results appeared to be a considerably more positive overall picture of adults than had previously been found. The semantic differential instrument required the subjects to rate three

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Elizabeth Thomas and Kaoru Yamamoto, "Attitudes Toward Age: An Exploration in School-Age Children," International Journal of Aging and Human Development, 6 No. 2 (1975), 127.

concepts, young person, middle person, and old person, on 12 seven-point bipolar scales, such as good-bad, strong-weak, or happy-sad. The overall mean of 9.68 in a range of 2 to 14 (scale points range from a low of 2 to a high of 14) indicated a positive evaluation which suggested that school children do not share generally negative attitudes toward old age.³⁰

The investigation revealed favorable attitudes toward adults of all ages among the subjects. They concluded by saying that it appeared "that impressions of children are flexible, and they [impressions] may be greatly influenced by realistic education."³¹

Seltzer and Atchley examined changes in attitudes and stereotypes concerning old people as presented in children's books during the period from 1870 to 1960. A sample of books was randomly selected from Miami University Library. Three methods of analysis were used: semantic differential, content analysis, and frequency count.³²

Three hypotheses were tested: 1) attitudes toward old people would have become decreasingly positive over the past century, 2) there would have been a decrease in the number of references to old people, and 3) the more recent children's literature would reveal an increased variability

³⁰Ibid. ³¹Ibid., p. 128.

³²Seltzer and Atchley, op. cit., p. 118.

in the descriptions of old people. The third hypothesis was further divided by three subhypotheses: a) there are significant differences between personality descriptions of old and young characters, b) there are differences between activities initiated by old, and c) there are significant differences in actions directed toward or upon old people compared with young people.³³

The first hypothesis, which was tested with the semantic differential, indicated that the differences between the means for old and young characters were not statistically significant. The frequency count used to test the second hypothesis supported the prediction of a decrease in the number of references to old people. Both content analysis and semantic differential data were used to test the third hypothesis. The semantic differential used to test the first subhypothesis showed evidence of significant differences in personality descriptions within time periods. Content analysis used to test the second subhypothesis indicated that activity differences were both qualitative and quantitative in that over time, there had been an increase in the proportions of acts initiated by the old. The third subhypothesis was also tested with content analysis. The study indicated a significant difference in that the young, in reaction to the old, were recipients of proportionally more acts.³⁴

³³Ibid. ³⁴Ibid.

The findings did not support a generally negative picture about older people and things. For the most part, the study revealed that "there were fewer and less strong negative patterns than were expected."³⁵

Ansello undertook a study to quantify the types of behaviors assigned to older characters in picture books. Picture books examined were located in the Montgomery County, Maryland, Public Library. He examined a total of 549 books which consisted of 225,000 pages and 18,000 pictures. Most of the books that included older characters were published in the past nine years. The term "older" was applied to any character who was physically, verbally or occupationally described as older. The term "character" described any story member who spoke one word or more. Findings indicated that older characters were present in only 16.03 percent of all the books surveyed. The study reported that 55 percent of the older characters were male, 42 percent female and the balance was "undefined" (animal or machine). Of the 549 children's books examined, only 3.64 percent focused on an older person as the principal character of the story. Findings revealed that over three-fourths of the older characters have "indeterminate" occupational roles which seemed to have no real function or position.³⁶

³⁵Ibid., P. 128.

³⁶Ansello, op. cit., pp. 4-6.

Of the 18,000 illustrations, there were 816 pictures of older characters. The author gauged the character's importance by whether or not the character was shown alone on the picture book page. In less than one-half of one percent of all pictures do older characters appear alone.³⁷

A checklist of 136 adjectives pertaining to physical and personality characteristics was created for the study. The study revealed that a total of 75.3 percent of all physical descriptors consist of the single adjective "old," another 5.8 percent are covered by the word "little," and 2.5 percent by "ancient." These three adjectives comprised almost five-sixths of all physical descriptors applied in the books to older characters. The two most frequent adjectives describing an older character's personality are "sad" and "poor" representing a total of 15.6 percent of all personality descriptors. "Dear," "happy," and "pleased" are the three next most frequently used personality adjectives - 11.7 percent combined.³⁸

The study indicated that when older people are included in a story, they say rather than do and, on the whole, they perform mundane, uninteresting tasks rather than insightful, creative ones.³⁹

With only one dissenting finding, studies examining children's literature indicated a concern for the dishonest portrayal of minorities, including the aged. Evidence

³⁷Ibid. ³⁸Ibid. ³⁹Ibid.

indicated that by the age of eight, children have already formulated opinions and attitudes of the aged. Because those attitudes can be influenced by a realistic education, researchers seek the help of the librarian and educator in the use and selection of such materials.

THE METHODOLOGY

The picture books analyzed for this study were located in the Youth Collection at the University of Northern Iowa Library. Miss Arlene Ruthenberg, the Youth Collection Librarian, has devised an analytic picture book index which lists the subject headings of every picture book in the Youth Collection. Miss Ruthenberg, who is a former classroom teacher and school librarian, described this index as "crude and unsophisticated but practical for student use."⁴⁰ When analyzing these books, she includes no personal opinions or biases, but rather uses her professional judgement when assigning subject headings to each picture book. She assigns only those subject headings which relate to the theme or concept in the text or illustrations of the book. Only those picture books listed in the analytic picture book index as of March 4, 1977 under the subject headings of old age, grandparents, grandfather, and grandmother were used. Two of the books were not available for examination at the time the analysis was done. Therefore, only thirty-

⁴⁰Statement by Arlene Ruthenberg, Youth Librarian, Personal interview, Cedar Falls, Iowa, October 21, 1976.

three books were examined. The complete bibliographic information for all of those thirty-three books is listed in Appendix A.

From observations made in a random sample of books, a classification system of the stereotyped portrayals was developed by the researcher for use in doing the content analysis for each book. The first main category was main character. The author determined if the old person(s) in the story was a principal character of the story or if his (her) actions or conversations were equal to other main characters of the story.

For the second main category, examination was made of the function or role each elderly person had in a story. There are four subdivisions for this category.

1) Household tasks - elderly character(s) performed work activities inside the house.

2) Outside tasks - elderly character(s) performed work activities outside the house.

3) Social activities - elderly character(s) engaged in pasttime activities outside the home and activities other than those with family members.

4) Indeterminate - elderly character(s) seemed to have no real function.

The physical appearance category was subdivided as follows:

1) Ambulatory difficulties - difficulty in walking, walking with a cane, or walking slowly.

2) Visual or auditory difficulties - visual impairment or not seeing well or hard of hearing. The visual impairment must have been more pronounced than just wearing glasses.

3) Hair category - elderly character(s) had grey or white hair or balding.

4) Attire - elderly character(s) dressed in baggy, old-fashioned, unattractive clothes.

5) Feebleness - physical weakness, instability or sickness present in the elderly's portrayal.

6) Indeterminate - no evidence of any sub-category in the text or illustrations of a story.

The author examined the mannerisms, actions or attitudes of the elderly to determine which personality descriptors were most often used to portray the elderly.

1) Kind - friendly, gentle, or tender-hearted.⁴¹

2) Mean - selfish, bad-tempered, or disagreeable.⁴²

3) Sad - unhappy, mournful, characterized by dejection or sorrow.⁴³

4) Lonely - alone, unhappy at being alone; longing for friends or company.⁴⁴

5) Senility - a loss of mental facilities revealed in odd mannerisms or display of a confused sense of reality.

⁴¹Webster's New World Dictionary, (New York: The World Publishing Co.), 1960, p. 804.

⁴²Ibid., p. 911.

⁴³Ibid., p. 1282.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 863.

6) Nurturant - elderly character's behavior that is helping, praising, or serving.

7) Indeterminate - no evidence of any sub-category in the text or illustrations of a story.

A separate worksheet was used to record data for each picture book. An example of the worksheet is shown in Appendix B. Complete bibliographic information was recorded: author, illustrator, title, place of publication, publisher and copyright date. A statement summarizing each story was given on the worksheet. Each category or sub-category that was applicable was marked and comments added when necessary.

FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS

After analyzing the content of all picture books in the sample, a composite tally for each category or sub-category was made. Data were recorded on four tables corresponding to the four main categories of data, with a brief discussion for each.

Table 1

Number and percentage of books with
Old people as main character

Main Character	Number	%
Female-old	13	43
Male-old	13	43
Male/female- not old	7	14
Total	33	100

Table 1 reveals that male and female characters were portrayed the same number of times - 13, or 43 percent each. The data also reveals that old people were shown as a main character 26 times, or 86 percent. Therefore, the author accepted the first hypothesis that the elderly would be portrayed as a main character in 75 percent or more of the books analyzed. The most probable reason for this high percentage is the fact that all of the books examined contained an elderly character because of the use of the analytic picture book index. If this index had not been used, the probability of a lower percentage would have been greater.

When recording the frequency of occurrence for the three main categories used to classify portrayals of the elderly, each time one of the sub-categories was present in a book it was counted as one portrayal. Therefore, the total number of portrayals given in Tables 2, 3 and 4 is more than the total number of books analyzed.

Table 2

Number and percentage of portrayals for each sub-category of function or role

Sub-category	Female		Male		Combined	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Household tasks	11	34	2	10	13	25
Outside tasks	5	16	5	24	10	19
Social Activities	4	12	3	14	7	13
Indeterminate	12	38	11	52	23	43
Total	32	100	21	100	53	100

As Ansello⁴⁵ found, most of the functions or roles portrayed by the elderly were indeterminate. Table 2 shows that females totaled 12 portrayals, or 38 percent, while the male total was 11, or 52 percent. That combined total was 23, or 43 percent. Grandmother was often seen following Grandfather around with nothing else to do, and in many instances, it appeared that Grandfather's only function was to entertain his grandchildren.

The sub-category "household tasks" appeared 11 times, or 34 percent of the portrayals for female, while it appeared

⁴⁵Ansello, op. cit., p. 5.

twice, or 10 percent for males. The combination of male and female in that sub-category totaled 13, or 25 percent. An elderly female character was most often seen in the kitchen preparing a meal, doing dishes, or rocking in a rocking chair. One male was shown making shoes, and one Grandfather was shown preparing lunch for his grandson.

Table 2 also indicates that female "outside tasks" occurred 5 times, or 16 percent. Males showed the same number of occurrences for this sub-category, but the percentage was higher - 24 percent. Most of the outside activities included gardening or entertaining a grandchild outside.

The sub-category "social activities" has the lowest combined percentage - only 13 percent or 7 portrayals. Female social activities were shown 4 times, or 12 percent, while the male's total number was 3 which was 14 percent. Even though the percentage of this sub-category was low, the social activities that were described were very good. Some of them were: an interest in art, fishing, bridge clubs, and parttime employment. Most of the characters had few social activities other than entertaining their grandchildren or doing their normal tasks. Although many books presented a meaningful grandparent-grandchild relationship, few children experienced such a relationship with an old person who was not a relative. Therefore, the analyzed data for this category of function or role indicates that the elderly are seen most often in a stereotyped image.

Although all but one was present, no particular sub-

Table 3

Number and percentage of portrayals for each sub-category of physical appearance

Sub-category	Female		Male		Combined	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Ambulatory Diff.	7	16	5	16	12	17
Visual & Auditory	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hair	12	28	9	29	21	28
Attire	13	31	8	26	21	28
Feebleness	8	20	7	23	15	21
Indeterminate	2	5	2	6	4	6
Total	42	100	31	100	73	100

category in the physical appearance group was outstanding. Table 3 reveals the sub-category of physical appearance with the greatest frequencies for females to be "attire." That totaled 13, or 31 percent. For males, the largest sub-category was "hair," which totaled 9, or 29 percent. With the combination of male and female, these two sub-categories showed 21 frequencies, or 28 percent each. Female and male characters indicated 7 and 5 portrayals respectively, or 16 percent each, for the sub-category "ambulatory difficulties," while the combined total for the two was 12, or 17 percent. "Feebleness" occurred slightly more often with males, having 7 portrayals or 23 percent; females were represented in this sub-category in 8 instances, or 20 percent. That combined total was 15, or 21 percent. Table 3 also reveals that the "indeterminate" sub-category was evident twice for both male and female, or 6 percent and 5 percent respectively. That combination totaled 4, or 6 percent.

Other than the presence of glasses, no visual or auditory difficulties were evident. However, it was discovered that glasses were often used by an elderly character for possibly no other reason than to distinguish him/her from the middle-aged characters. The same was also evident with the hair sub-category. An elderly male was often seen with a beard and mustache, and though very popular today, not one middle-aged male character had a beard or mustache. In the attire sub-category, an elderly male was shown many times wearing suspenders as opposed to a belt. With the evidence of these physical appearance descriptors, the author must conclude that this category portrays the elderly in a stereotyped image.

Table 4

Number and percentage of portrayals for each sub-category of personality descriptors

Sub-category	Female		Male		Combined	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Kind	23	53	15	57	38	55
Mean	1	2	0	0	1	1
Lonely	3	8	1	4	4	6
Sad	1	2	1	4	2	3
Senile	1	2	1	4	2	3
Nurturant	14	33	5	19	19	28
Indeterminate	0	0	3	12	3	4
Total	43	100	26	100	69	100

The most significant finding in Table 4 is the sub-category "kind." This personality descriptor was used in

23 portrayals, or 53 percent for females and for males, 15 portrayals, or 57 percent. Their combined total of 38 was more than half of the portrayals at 55 percent. Not surprisingly, many of those characters which showed a kind personality were also portrayed as "nurturant." This sub-category ranked second highest for both females and males. Females totaled 14, or 33 percent, while males totaled 5, or 19 percent. "Meanness" was present only once, which was 2 percent of the female total. The sub-category "lonely" was evident 3 times, or 8 percent of the female's total, while only one time, or 4 percent could be found for males. The combined total for female and male groups in the sub-categories "sad" and "senile" was found to be 2 each, or 3 percent each. "Indeterminate" was evident in 3 portrayals, or 12 percent for the males, but no portrayals for females.

The two descriptors, "kind" and "nurturant," totaled more than three-fourths of all personality descriptors. This finding is consistent with Ansello that "their [elderly] descriptions are flat and unidimensional - as if saying someone is 'old' says all that needs to be said."⁴⁶ Certainly no minority would feel comfortable being circumscribed by only two words. With this lack of human emotions evident in the sample of books, the author concluded that the personality of the elderly was presented in a stereotyped manner.

⁴⁶Ansello, op. cit., p. 6.

The author concluded that children's picture books do not depict old age as an enjoyable period of life as it can be. Therefore, the second hypothesis that through functions or roles, physical appearance and personality, the elderly would be portrayed in a stereotyped image in the books analyzed, is accepted. Old people are not shown as being capable of self-care or as active or productive. Children can learn that the elderly are not interesting people and that old age is a time of restricted activity, both socially and personally. In turn, these stereotyped characteristics can help reinforce society's negative image of old age.

Table 5

Number of portrayals of male and female characters in three main categories

Main Categories	Female	Male	Combined
Function/role	32	21	53
Physical appearance	42	31	73
Personality	43	26	69
Total	117	78	195

Table 5 shows the total number of portrayals in each of the three main categories. Though not searching for this information, it is interesting to note that the total number of portrayals for females, 117, is much larger than the total number of portrayals for males, 78. Sixty percent of the total number of portrayals represented female characters and only 40 percent represented males. Apparently, females

were more often portrayed in a stereotyped manner even though the number of female and male main characters in the sample of picture books was equal. This finding may be the basis for additional studies in this area to determine if female characters are stereotyped more frequently than males.

SUMMARY

Studies have found that minorities have been portrayed in a stereotyped image in children's picture books. Since the elderly have been considered a minority group, this study examined the portrayal of the elderly in picture books to determine if a stereotyped image is present. Content analysis was performed on thirty-three books. A worksheet was devised which contained the four main categories main character, function or role, physical appearance, and personality descriptors. Sub-categories for each main category were also provided on the worksheet. Frequency of occurrence for each category or sub-category was then recorded on the worksheet. After the analysis was completed, a composite tally was made. Figures indicated that the elderly were portrayed as a main character in 86 percent of the books analyzed. This high percentage was believed to have been present because of the use of an analytic picture book index. Figures also indicated that a stereotyped image of the elderly is present in picture books for each of the three main categories function or role, physical appearance and personality descriptors.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

Books analyzed

- Adshead, Gladys L., Brownies - Hush! (New York: Oxford University Press, 1938).
illus: Jones, Elizabeth Orton
- Adshead, Gladys L., Brownies - It's Christmas (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955)
illus: Ilsley, Velma
- Adshead, Gladys L., Brownies - They're Moving (New York: Henry Z. Walck, Inc, 1970)
illus: Levenson, Richard
- Borack, Barbara, Grandpa (New York: Harper & Row, 1967)
illus: Shecter, Ben
- Boutwell, Edna, Red Rooster (New York: Aladdin Books, 1950)
illus: Garbutt, Bernard
- Brenner, Barbara, Beef Stew (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965)
illus: Johnson, John E.
- Buckley, Helen E., Grandfather and I (New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shephard & Co., 1959)
illus: Galdone, Paul
- Buckley, Helen E., Grandmother and I (New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shephard & Co., 1961)
illus: Galdone, Paul
- Carrick, Carol, Old Mother Witch (New York: Seabury Press, 1975)
illus: Carrick, Donald
- Copeland, Helen, Meet Miki Takino (New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shephard & Co., 1963)
illus: Werth, Kurt
- Coutant, Helen, First Snow (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974)
illus: Vo Dinh
- De Paola, Tomie, Watch Out For The Chicken Feet in Your Soup (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1974)
illus: De Paola, Tomie
- Fassler, Joan, My Grandpa Died Today (New York: Human Science Press, 1971)
illus: Kranz, Stuart

- Flora, James, Grandpa's Farm (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1965)
illus: Flora, James
- Goffstein, M. B., Fish for Supper (New York: Dial Press, 1976)
illus: Goffstein, M. B.
- Ipcar, Dahlov, One Horse Farm (New York: Doubleday, 1950)
illus: Ipcar, Dahlov
- Langstaff, John., Ol' Dan Tucker (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World., 1963)
illus: Krush, Joe
- Lasky, Lathryn, I Have Four Names for My Grandfather (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1976)
illus: Knight, Christopher G.
- Lexau, Joan M., Benji (New York: The Dial Press, 1964)
illus: Bolognese
- Llerena, Carlos Antonio, The Fair at Kanta (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1975)
illus: Llerena, Carlos Antonio
- Lundgren, Max, Matt's Grandfather (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1972)
illus: Hold, Fibben
- Miles, Miska, Annie and the Old One (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1971)
illus: Parnall, Peter
- Minarik, Else Holmelund, A Kiss for Little Bear (New York: Harper & Row, 1968)
illus: Sendak, Maurice
- Minarik, Else Holmelund, Little Bear's Visit (New York: Harper & Row, 1961)
illus: Sendak, Maurice
- Ness, Evaline, Josefina February (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963)
illus: Ness, Evaline
- Parish, Peggy, Granny and the Indians (New York: Macmillan, 1969)
illus: Turkle, Brenton
- Parnall, Peter, The Great Fish (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1973)
illus: Parnall, Peter

Politi, Leo, Three Stalks of Corn (New York: Charles
Scribner's Sons, 1976)
illus: Politi, Leo

Tripp, Wallace, My Uncle Podger (Boston: Little, Brown
& Co., 1975)
illus: Tripp, Wallace

Udry, Janice May, Mary Joe's Grandmother (Chicago: Albert
Whitman & Co., 1970)
illus: Mill, Eleanor

Williams, Barbara, Albert's Toothache (New York: E. P.
Dutton, 1974)
illus: Chorao, Kay

Williams, Barbara, Kevin's Grandma (New York: E. P.
Dutton, 1975)
illus: Chorao, Kay

Zolotow, Charlotte, My Grandson Lew (New York: Harper
& Row, 1974)
illus: Du Bois, William Pine

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Statement:

	Female	Male	Comments
Main Character			
Function or role			
Household Tasks _____			
Outside Tasks _____			
Social Activities _____			
Indeterminate _____			
Physical appearance			
Ambulatory difficulties _____			
Visual & auditory _____			
Hair _____			
Attire _____			
Feebleness _____			
Indeterminate _____			
Personality Descriptors			
Kind _____			
Mean _____			
Lonely _____			
Sad _____			
Senile _____			
Nuturant _____			
Indeterminate _____			