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References to Gendered Grief in Children's Media: A Content Analysis of Grief Picture Books

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A Content Analysis of Grief Picture Books

by

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Table of Contents

Abstract

Gender stereotypes, gender roles and the underrepresentation of women permeate modern American culture. These forms of sexism limit the socially acceptable ways that children are able to express difficult emotion as they move through the grief process. This study focusses on these forms of sexism as they influence the creation and continuation of gendered grief by coding seventeen children's grief picture books. Findings support the hypotheses that, not only are gender stereotypes, roles and the underrepresentation of both men and women present in grief picture books, but that they contribute to gendered grief. Suggestions for future research include a larger sample size and in-depth looks at specific contributors to gendered grief.

Keywords: gender, stereotypes, gender roles, picture books, gendered grief

References to Gendered Grief in Children's Media: A Content Analysis of Grief Picture Books

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During the 1970's, feminism began popularizing the modern idea of gender with the Women's Liberation Movement. Gender is defined as; 1) sex, and 2) the behavioral, cultural and psychological traits typically associated with each sex (Gender, n.d.). These definitions of gender are among the most popular, and are also the definitions employed within this research. Since this popularization of gender, gender roles, stereotypes and their impacts have been studied on countless occasions. However, in the late 1990's, with the heavy increase of support for the Gay Rights Movement, research on gender and its effects grew exponentially. Recently, in the United States, we have seen massive strides towards gender equality, including the famous Roe v. Wade Supreme Court case of 1973, the Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978, the Jackson v. Birmingham Board of Education Supreme Court case of 2005, and, more recently, the 2013 announcement that the ban on women serving in combat roles would be lifted (Imbornoni, 2007). Gender inequality, that once was so obvious, is becoming less blatant as time goes on.

Despite these massive shifts in political policy and social support towards gender equality, there is agreement among researchers and academics that gender inequality, in its most embedded of forms, maintains a strong hold on society and its cultural beliefs (Collins, 2011). Current statistics on a variety of sectors, from employment to prison, reflect these current sociocultural stances. Employment, for instance, is just one of the areas in a woman's life that is affected by gender roles. Women earn only $0.81 for every $1.00 that a man makes, while one in five women are underemployed because they cannot find full-time work (DOL, 2011).

Additionally, only 46.7% of women are employed at all; a large decline from the 60%

employment rate of 2000 (DOL, 2011). Only 24% of the CEO's in the United States are made up

by these employed women (DOL, 2011). Gender issues aren't just for women, though, as men

battle gender roles and their effects just as often. Men, for example, make up approximately 93%

of those in jails or prisons (Kilmartin, 2010). Men are also less likely than women to obtain an

education with only 34.9% of men receiving a Bachelor's degree (DOL, 2011). Each of these

statistics show only the tip of the iceberg; a fraction of the sexism currently affecting every

individual in the modern United States.

Background

Gender stereotypes, gender roles and sexism are largely related. While gender roles are

typically the outward expression of one's own gender identity, often being sorted along the

gender binary, or male and female, an individual's gender role is often expected to fall in line

with gender stereotypes; or the assumption of an individual's gender role based on their sex.

Sexism, then, is the systematic and institutionalized prejudice against individuals who, often, are

failing to fall in line with these traditional gender stereotypes or roles or are believed to be

innately lesser based on their sex. Gender stereotypes, gender roles and sexism intertwine to

create a widespread system of problems, like the aforementioned employment and prison issues.

They are also deeply embedded in the current United States sociocultural beliefs and attitudes. In

order to address each of these issues and their effects, the places where these ideas are generated

and perpetuated need to be identified and attended to.

The popular media is one of the best reflections of current sociocultural beliefs, including

gender roles and gender stereotypes (Paterson and Lach, 1990). Women are frequently under-

represented across multiple types of media. When women are represented, they are frequently

depicted as classically feminine, therefore maintaining feminine roles (Collins, 2011).

Furthermore, when studies do find a more equal representation of women, especially in

children's picture books, the women tend to be portrayed negatively (Collins, 2011). Men, on the

other hand, tend to be depicted in stereotypically masculine roles, and also rarely depart from

traditional gender roles. They're most commonly portrayed as aggressive, argumentative, and

competitive (Evans and Davies, 2000). These sexist representations exist in the forefront of other

various forms of media as well, including music videos, newspapers, magazines, movies,

advertisements, television, video games and more (Collins, 2011). Media, then, is likely to

perpetuate gender stereotyping by facilitating a cycle between sexist roles portrayed across

popular media and the current sociocultural viewpoints of Americans.

Children's media is by no means immune to sexist stereotyping. In fact, textbooks, toy

commercials, films, books, and other media geared towards children maintain the same sexist

attitudes that media geared towards adults does (Collins, 2011; Evans and Davies, 2000;

Kahlenburg and Hein, 2009; Hamilton et. al., 2006). In elementary school reading textbooks,

males have been depicted as adhering strictly to masculine gender roles, by being portrayed as

aggressive, argumentative and competitive (Evans and Davies, 2000). With very similar results,

Kahlenburg and Hein (2009) found that boys are more often depicted outside and playing

competitively than young girls are in toy commercials. This media, and its sexist and gender role

conforming content, is likely to impact a child's development and sociocultural beliefs.

Children's media, including picture books, has a large impact on a child's development.

Children's books are the primary vehicle for the transmission of societal values (Paterson and

Lach, 1990). They allow children to delve into topics that are relevant to their lives (Wiseman,

2012), while also encouraging them to create connections between their own lives and those of

the characters (Wiseman, 2012). Identification with the picture books provides children with role

models and ideas on what they will—or should—be like when they grow up (Paterson and Lach,

1990). By providing these role models and future expectations for children, picture books play a

large, active role in maintaining social structure by molding young readers to fit in with that

structure as they age (Paterson and Lach, 1990).

      This molding of young readers expands heavily into gender development. Picture books

play a large part in gender role construction (Paterson and Lach, 1990). Between the ages of

three to five, children start developing and incorporating gender stereotypes in their lives

(Hamilton et. al., 2006). Children absorb this gender role information from media in order to

form their own self concepts and gender schemes—how they view the role that gender has in

their life (Paterson and Lach, 1990). These schemes and self concepts dictate how a child grows

to see the world (Paterson and Lach, 1990). Gendered expectations present in children's media

also heavily influence a child's level of cognitive development through an impact on cognitive

processes, such as reading comprehension and memory recall (Paterson and Lach, 1990). By

offering children standards for feminine and masculine gendered behavior and models for

understanding these standards in themselves and others (Hamilton et. al., 2006), media plays an

extremely important role in a child's life .

      Picture books are no doubt a part of a young child's typical school day. Children are also

frequently exposed to books through local libraries and bedtime stories. However, it's the

implementation of books in counseling and therapy, known as bibliotherapy, that's the main

focus of this research. Bibliotherapy is implemented in classrooms and counseling settings for

children who are experiencing emotional and physical hardship (Wiseman, 2012). Often times, a

child may have difficulty defining and expressing emotions and ideas, specifically during times

of loss (Berns, 2003). Children also tend to feel alone in their feelings and thoughts when

experiencing these difficult emotions (Berns, 2003). Bibliotherapy helps to remedy these

problems by lessening a child's feelings of isolation and allowing them the opportunity to focus

outside of themselves while expressing emotions and ideas (Berns, 2003). Bibliotherapy also

allows a child to consider their own feelings and attitudes on a subject while reflecting on the

similarities in their own lives in order to work past any difficult feelings that they might have

(Wiseman, 2012). Bibliotherapy is often implemented for children experiencing grief or loss

using grief picture books, or picture books focused on death and the grieving process, as these

are times when a child is required to work through intricate emotions. It is these intricate

emotions that often leave children—and adults—looking to their expected social roles for help.

 Gender roles, stereotypes and social expectations certainly are influential when trying to

define and decipher expectations for emotions, especially during times of loss. In terms of social-

emotional roles, men are expected to portray masculine traits, while women are expected to

portray feminine traits. Sandra Bem, when attempting to examine psychological androgyny,

created the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) that is one of the first, and most widely recognized,

measures to document and define feminine and masculine traits (Bem, 1974). By surveying a

group of people on the social desirability of traits per sex, Bem came up with a list of forty

stereotypical masculine and feminine traits (Bem, 1974). Bem (1974) defines feminine qualities

to include "sympathetic," "affectionate," "gentle," "tender," "compassionate," and "warm,"

while masculine qualities to include "aggressive," "competitive," "dominant," "analytical," "forceful," and "assertive." These gendered traits influence how emotion is conveyed, especially during highly emotionalized situations.

Not only does gender influence emotion, but gender is now a widely accepted contributing indicator to the diversity of grief processes (Doughty, 2009). During bereavement, or deprivation after a death of a family member or friend, women express their emotions more frequently and earlier than men do (Baarsen and Broese van Groenou, 2011). Men, on the other hand, prefer to wait a period of time before displaying even less emotion than the women do (Baarsen and Broese van Groenou, 2011). The engendering of grief and emotion is undeniable, however, the origin of the phenomenon is unknown and presently debated. The greatest consensus among academics, however, relating to the origin of gendered grief and emotion, documents sociocultural influences throughout the critical periods of development (Fivush and Zaman, 2013). These sociocultural influences inevitably include the gender inequity that permeates children's media, as it is likely to have an impact on a child's level of emotional portrayal during periods of grief. The limitation of, or expectation for, emotion for children during grief is bound to be problematic. Each child grieves in their own way; one child may display levels of anger, while another child experiences deep sadness (Berns, 2003). By limiting which emotions a child is allowed to display, we have effectively limited how they are to grieve and process their emotion. It is not only important, but necessary, to research gendered grief and its origins.

This study assesses recommended children's grief picture books in order to determine whether or not they reflect gender characterizations central to current American sociocultural

beliefs, including gender roles and stereotypes. Furthermore, the gender differences that are found to exist are addressed as they relate to the origin and perpetuation of gendered grief.

Hypotheses

I expected to find an underrepresentation of women, in general, and an underrepresentation of men in highly emotionalized scenarios. I also expected male characters to display a strict adherence to gender roles and stereotypes in both language and illustration. These hypotheses are in line with previous research on gender in children's picture books, including Paterson and Lach's (1990), Diekman and Murnen's (2004) and Gooden and Gooden's (2001) research. Additionally, although Tepper and Cassidy's (1999) research on emotional language in children's picture books found no gender differences in emotional language, I expected to find more women using emotional language, because grief books contain more emotional language than most popular, everyday children's picture books do. Overall, I expected to be able to use the gender inequity in emotional language found within the children's grief picture books to make an argument for the origins of gendered grief.

Literature Review

Quantitative research on gender representation and gender stereotyping in children's picture books has been continuous since the late 1970's. Over this time, there have been few deviations in findings. There has also been little deviation away from popular, award winning books as the subjects of these research studies, resulting in no research having been conducted on gender in grief picture books given that they aren't incorporated in these mainstream book lists. This gap in the current research field makes finding supporting or comparable research hard to come by. A few studies, however, have been conducted on the gender differences in emotion and

gendered grief. These studies represent the backbone for the gendered grief portion of this

research. Additionally, qualitative research on gender representation and gender stereotyping in

children's picture books is a newer field, and few studies are available for comparison, resulting

in the majority of the support for this research coming from quantitative research.

Gender Inequity and Sexist Stereotyping in Children's Picture Books

Quantitative studies on gender inequality, under-representation of women and gender role

stereotypes in children's picture books are not hard to come by. Paterson and Lach (1999) and

Gooden and Gooden (2001) focused on gender representation and stereotypes and their change

over time, as well as their effect on development, finding that the prevalence of

underrepresentation and stereotypes had receded with time. Hamilton (2006) mirrored the

previous research of Paterson and Lach (1999) and Gooden and Gooden (2001), but came up

with different results; that sexism in children's picture books has remained as prominent as ever

across time. Diekman and Murnen (2004) and DeWitt (2013) focused on books categorized as

sexist or nonsexist and stereotype presence within parenting roles, respectively. Each of these

studies provides a key representation of the current types of literature that detail inequity in

gender representations and overt gender roles in children's picture books.

Gender representation in children's picture books has been studied since the late 1970's.

The majority of research on gender representation agrees on the fact that women are often

underrepresented in children's picture books (Paterson and Lach, 1999). However, there is little

consensus in the research field about whether the underrepresentation of women is becoming less

of an issue as time goes on. In 1999, Paterson and Lach found that the gap between male and

female representation is lessening as the years progress, and that the likelihood of each gender

being portrayed in the same type of situation has increased. Gooden and Gooden's (2001)

findings are very similar to Paterson and Lach's (1999). Gooden and Gooden (2001) found that,

although the data supports that there has been greater equity in the representation of women in

more recent years, there remain problems in regards to the limited improvement.

      The pervasiveness of stereotypical gender roles in children's picture books also remains a

problem. Paterson and Lach (1999) addressed gender stereotypes by acknowledging that

stereotype-free books are still not a reality. They also acknowledged a trend towards decreasing

stereotypes, but stated that it maintains no statistical significance (Paterson and Lach, 1999).

Hamilton (2006) also studied gender stereotypes in picture books and found that there are no

statistically significant changes in depicted sexism over time, revealing that sexism is as

prominent now as it was in the past. Despite continued research on gender stereotypes in

children's books, there seems to be a growing academic consensus that sexism remains equally

as present now as it once was. Expecting to find different results, Diekman and Murnen (2004)

specifically concentrated on books that were previously labeled "non-sexist". They found that,

although the books were marketed as non-sexist, they still contained stereotypic personalities and

activities (Diekman and Murnen, 2004). They did, however, find that stereotypically masculine

characteristics were more equally distributed between both females and males, despite

stereotypically feminine characteristics remaining tightly adhered to solely females (Diekman

and Murnen, 2004). Furthermore, Diekman and Murnen (2004) found that males were most

commonly portrayed in their stereotypical gender roles, while females were given more leniency

in their roles. This research on gender roles in children's picture books is among one of the

newer topics studied within the field. DeWitt (2013) attempted to close some of the gaps in the

gender role conversation by examining the gender roles of mothers and fathers. DeWitt (2013) found that mothers were more active in nurturing and caregiving roles while fathers were more active in providing and companion roles, suggesting a close adherence to traditional and stereotypical gender roles.

The results of underrepresentation and gender stereotypes in children's books are still widely debated, however most researchers agree on the fact that the effects of these sexist portrayals are both negative and impactful. Paterson and Lach (1999) extensively detailed the impact of gender stereotyping and under-representation on cognitive and affective development, stating that these stereotypes present children with a potentially destructive world view of genders being so divided. They continue by arguing that gender stereotypes and their pervasiveness in children's literature may go so far as to impair the development of positive self-concepts (Paterson and Lach, 1999). Gooden and Gooden (2001) also address the negative impacts of sexist portrayals in children's picture books by acknowledging that gender stereotypes can have a severe detrimental impact on a child's perception of women's roles in society, as well as the child's own sexual and gender identity. In the end, Diekmann and Murnen (2004) argue that the gender roles portrayed within children's picture books both perpetuate and reflect the current sociological state of gender inequality, showing that American society has a long way to go in terms of gender equality and the elimination of sexism.

Gendered Grief and Gender Differences in Emotional Language

The idea of gendered grief and emotional gender differences is relatively new, and research is few and far between, spread across topics with wide gaps in the research. Tepper and Cassidy (1999), Baarsen and Broese von Groenou (2001) and Bennett, Hughes and Smith (2003)

are all key players in the field and each of them makes significant attempts to fill in the gaps. Although each of their studies is older, the research accurately represents the current consensus in the field.

One of the best ways to identify gender differences during the grieving process and bereavement is to look at differences in how men and women cope with the death of a spouse. Baarsen and Broese von Groenou (2001) look at just that, and focused on gender differences in older individuals during bereavement. They found that widowers, and not widows, reflected more emotional loneliness and more frequent coping behavior—such as reaching out to friends and family—as time progressed. Despite these findings, when men are asked about their abilities to cope, they state that they feel that women are more equipped to handle loss and grief (Bennett et. al., 2003). Men are also found to receive more support during the grieving process than women do, suggesting that it is a widely spread belief that men are less equipped than women to handle a spousal loss (Bennett et. al., 2003).

Another way that gendered emotion is addressed is by looking at how parents communicate emotion to their children. By looking at gender pairing between children and their parents, the origins and perpetuation of gendered emotion begin to reveal themselves. Fivush, Buckner and Goodman (2000) focused on gender differences in parent-child emotional narratives by having parents speak to children about emotional past experiences. They found that women and girls used more emotionally charged words and talked more than did men and boys in the same situation (Fivush et. al., 2000). Furthermore, situations where parents spoke to their daughters, included more emotionally charged words than situations where parents spoke to their sons (Fivush et. al., 2000). These gender differences in emotional language reflect the traditional

gender roles and expectations in modern American culture that are likely influencing the gendered display of emotion in children's picture books.

Among the most influential and helpful at filling in large gaps in the current research field is Tepper and Cassidy's (1999) research that's focused on gender differences in emotional language within children's picture books. Tepper and Cassidy (1999) created a model for future research on emotion in children's picture books. They found that, although males were more prominent throughout the picture books, reflecting the majority of previous research, emotional language was distributed evenly between men and women characters (Tepper and Cassidy, 1999). Furthermore, no differences were found between men and women when it came to analyzing the types of emotional words used by each gender. These findings were incredibly surprising to the current researchers within the field given the previous research that documents such extensive gender differences in both representation and role. While taking into account the findings of Tepper and Cassidy's (1999) research, the current study hypothesizes that gender differences in emotional language are bound to exist. This deviation in expectation from past findings is due to book selection differences between Tepper and Cassidy's (1999) research and the children's grief picture books used within the current study. While Tepper and Cassidy's (1999) research focused on popular, mainstream picture books, the current research focuses on books that are naturally more emotionally based with more emotional language. Therefore, taking into account the more recent Fivush, Buckner and Goodman's (2000) and Baarsen and Broese von Groenou's (2001) studies, the hypothesis that gendered grief exists within children's grief picture books remains intact.

Methodology

As the research showed, studies related to gendered grief, specifically in children's

books, is either limited or non-existent, depicting a gap in the research. The current study goes so

far as to fill in a section of the gap and provide a foundation for future research in the field by

coding children's grief picture books to determine whether or not they reflect gender differences

and gendered grief. The presence of gender differences, including under-representation, sexism

and stereotypes, and gendered grief was hypothesized.

Book Selection

When identifying books to be used within this study, it was pertinent that the books be

currently used and recommended for bibliotherapy for younger children and that the books be

applicable nationwide. It was also necessary that each type of grief picture book—parent loss,

friend loss and animal loss, and animal characters, inanimate object characters and human

characters—were represented. Because the National Association of School Psychologist's

(NASP) *Recommended Books for Children Coping with Loss or Trauma* (2013) list fit this

criteria, all seventeen books used in this study were taken from this list (See Table 1). The NASP

list is split into two sections; "Picture Books" and "General" books. All of the books listed in the

"Picture Books" section were coded. An additional three books came from the "General" section

of the NASP list. The three books that were included from the "General" section of the NASP's

list were included because they explicitly talked about dying and grief and were appropriate for

younger children. The remaining fourteen books listed in the "General" section were not used for

this study, because they were marked as being targeted at older children or did not explicitly

focus on the topic of grief. Book publication date did not play a role in determining the

qualification of the book for the study, because the list of books was created recently enough to

allude to the fact that the book is still currently utilized.

Table 1: List of Utilized Grief Picture Books

Title of Book	Author	Illustrator
Always and Forever	Alan Durant	Debi Gliori
Badger's Parting Gifts	Susan Varley	Susan Varley
Bear's Last Journey	Udo Weingelt	Cristina Kadmon
Dead Bird	Margaret Brown Wise	Remy Charlip
Everett Anderson's Goodbye	Lucille Clifton	Ann Grifalconi
Goodbye Mousie	Robie H. Harris	Jan Ormerod
The Purple Balloon	Chris Raschka	Chris Raschka
Remembering Crystal	Sebastian Loth	Sebastian Loth
Rudi's Pond	Eve Bunting	Ronald Himler
Sammy in the Sky	Barbara Walsh	Jamie Wyeth
The Scar	Charlotte Moundlic	Olivier Tallec
Six is So Much Less Than Seven	Ronald Himler	Ronald Himler
Someone Special Died	Joan Prestine	Virginia Kylberg
Where Do People Go When They Die	Mindy Avra Portnoy	Shelly O. Haas
Good-bye, Sheep	Robert Burleigh	Peter Catalanotto
Old Pig	Margaret Wild	Ron Brooks
Saying Goodbye to Lulu	Corrine Demas	Ard Hoyt

All of the children's grief picture books were obtained from a local library. For the

purposes of this study, children's grief picture books are defined as any book that explicitly

focuses on grief and is targeted at younger—ages 3-7—children. The books must also contain

illustrations that are of equal or greater importance to the textual storytelling. Before any coding

took place, all of the books were read twice to eliminate any initial bias. The third and fourth

times reading through each of the books were used to code quantitative measurements in order to ensure accuracy. Following quantitative codes, any subsequent read-throughs of the books were used to obtain qualitative data and identify themes within the text and illustrations. All books were read and analyzed by a single coder.

Coding Schemes: Quantitative Gender Representation in Text and Illustration

To best assess gender representation in both text and illustration, a coding mechanism was constructed by combining coding schemes from Gooden and Gooden (2001) and Hamilton (2006). Each book was coded for 9 items overall. Three of these items included the titles, authors, and illustrators. Another two items consisted of the main character's gender and the number of times they were depicted, while an additional four items consisted of the number of male and female characters and the amount of times that each gender was depicted. The main character was defined as the character with the most depictions. Determining the gender of each character relied on identifying pronouns in the text. If identifying pronouns weren't present, traditional gender associations with illustrations were made. For example, a dress most likely indicated a female, while short hair and pants more likely indicated a male. If the gender of a character could not be determined, the character was coded as "neutral."

Coding Schemes: Qualitative Gender in Emotional Language

In order to identify gender in emotional language, a coding mechanism was constructed by combining the coding schemes from Evans and Davies (2000) and Tepper and Cassidy (1999). Taking from the Evans and Davies (2000) study, all 16 of their main character traits were utilized. Examples of these traits include, "adventurous," "nurturing," "passive," and "competitive." These traits are split into two categories: feminine and masculine, with each

category containing eight traits. Operational definitions from the Evans and Davies (2000) study were implemented in the current study. However, not mirroring Evans and Davies (2000), each trait was coded every time it appeared for the main character, rather than once per occurrence, in order to gain a better grasp on patterns across books and to discuss the implications of these patterns. For each time that the main character displayed one of the 16 traits throughout the text, a "yes" was marked next to that trait.

Taking from the Tepper and Cassidy (1999) instrument, each book was coded for all 11 of their identified emotions. These included "interest/excitement," "sadness," "shame" and "like/love." The operational definitions from the Tepper and Cassidy (1999) study were utilized. For every use of emotional language throughout the text, the presence of the trait was noted with a "yes," along with the gender of the character exhibiting the emotion.

Following the implementation of each of these coding schemes, additional read-throughs of each book were performed, where patterns, outliers and phenomenon were identified and analyzed for further discussion.

Results

Table 2: Character Distribution By Gender

	Male	Female
Main Characters	57.1%	42.9%
Main Character Depictions	48%	52%
All Characters	53.7%	46.3%
All Character Depictions	57.8%	42.2%

Results supported the hypothesis that females would remain under-represented, in general, throughout children's grief picture books—a finding that is also in line with previous

research. Males were found to make up the majority of main characters and characters overall.

Over 57% of character depictions were found to be of males. However, although only around

43% of main characters were females, 52% of the main character depictions were females. This

is most likely due to the fact that female main characters were often depicted being comforted or

communicated to—a passive role that allows for more depictions in background space, whereas

male main character depictions usually portrayed the male main character being more active.

Table 3: Main Character Feminine Traits

Trait	Displayed by Female	Displayed by Male
Affectionate	100%	62.5%
Emotionally Expressive	83.3%	62.5%
Impetuous	33.3%	12.5%
Nurturing	50%	87.5%
Panicky	16.6%	37.5%
Passive	33.3%	12.5%
Tender	50%	37.5%
Understanding	83.3%	25%

In addition to females being underrepresented, female characters also seemed to portray

more stereotypically feminine traits with at least half of the female main characters being

affectionate, emotionally expressive, nurturing, tender and understanding. The only cases where

male main characters tended to portray feminine traits more frequently than female main

characters did was when it came to nurturing and panicky behavior. Since "nurturing" included

taking care of someone as they went through the grief or bereavement process, and although

being nurturing is typically a feminine trait, in these contexts it can be seen as a protective

caretaker role that tends to be more masculine in nature. This explains the reason that over 87%

of male main characters displayed nurturing behavior.

Table 4: Main Character Masculine Traits

Trait	Displayed by Female	Displayed by Male
Adventurous	83.3%	37.5%
Aggressive	50%	25%
Argumentative	50%	37.5%
Assertive	33.3%	50%
Competitive	16.6%	12.5%
Decisive	33.3%	50%
Risk-Taker	0%	12.5%
Self-Reliant	16.6%	62.5%

In regards to panicky behavior being found to be more typical for male main characters to

display, this phenomenon may be due to the fact that the male main characters seemed to be

more-often left to their own devices when maneuvering through the grief process, and are

authored as being panicky as a result. This self-reliance is evident by the fact that over 62% of

the male main characters displayed the self-reliant trait, compared to only 16.6% of females.

Unsurprisingly, female main characters displayed a great deal of masculine traits. This

goes along with previous research showing that modern female characters are portrayed more

gender-neutral than in previous decades. Female main characters were shown to be more often

adventurous, aggressive, argumentative, and competitive than male main characters were. In fact,

female main characters, overall, portrayed more traits than male main characters did, especially

when it came down to more emotional-focussed traits like "aggressive", "affectionate" and

"tender". This supports the hypothesis that male characters are underrepresented in highly

emotionalized situations.

Table 5: Percentage of Emotional Language

Type	Female	Male
Interest/Excitement	63.2%	36.8%
Enjoyment/Joy	38.5%	61.5%
Surprise/Astonishment	50%	50%
Sadness	35.4%	64.6%
Anger	31.6%	68.4%
Disgust/Contempt	25%	75%
Fear/Anxiety	23.5%	76.5%
Shyness	N/A	N/A
Shame	0%	100%
Guilt/Conscience/Morality	42.9%	57.1%
Like/Love	33.3%	66.7%
Total Emotional Language	35.3%	64.7%

Surprisingly, the majority of emotional language throughout the grief picture books can

be attributed to male characters. Male characters were found to be attributed to over 64% of the

emotional language. This indicates that, while females were found to be attributed to more

displays of emotional traits, males emotions are explained more frequently. While this finding

goes against the previous hypothesis, it brings to light a new phenomenon. More emotional

language may be used to describe males to make up for the lack of emotional depictions

throughout the illustrations. The language may also be used to accentuate the validity of the male

character's emotions. It is also important to note that many of these emotions, such as shame,

guilt, fear, and contempt, look differently, and are conceived differently, in a grief situation than they are in everyday situations where this coding mechanism was previously utilized. For example, fear surrounding a grieving process can be interpreted much differently than fear in everyday life. The fact that male characters displayed more of these troubling emotions during their grief process—such as guilt, shame, fear, and contempt—alludes to a larger gendered grief issue in modern American culture.

Discussion: Themes

There were many trends that became evident as the coding of gender roles, stereotypes and gendered grief progressed. Many books used props and clothing to accentuate or convey the genders of their characters. Other books fed into gender stereotypes by unintentionally depicting characters explaining death in different ways according to their gender, while, still others, severely contributed to the underrepresentation of females. Furthermore, some books were found to negatively reinforce emotion, most specifically towards males. The majority of the utilized children's grief picture books contained at least one of these themes. However, a few books attempted gender neutrality in different ways.

Propping Up Stereotypes

While analyzing the children's grief picture books for gendered grief, it became apparent that, not only are stereotypes and gender roles present in character portrayal, but props and clothing choices are used within the illustrations to convey or enhance a character's gender. These additions to the illustrations were arguably unnecessary. Most additions were detrimental to the storyline by taking away from the what the child was intended to gain from the theme. Other times, the props became background noise. Overall, though, each of these additions ended

up creating illustrations that limited the intended audiences. The props appeal to either a

feminine or masculine audience by enhancing the femininity or masculinity of the character. This

effectively reduces the population to whom the books can aid in times of grief by reducing the

amount of children who can relate to the book.

       One of the most noticeable illustration techniques among the picture books was the use of

props. Toys appeared across many of the grief picture books. The books whose main characters

are males tended to include many vehicles in the illustrations of the characters. Harris's

"Goodbye Mousie" (2004) displayed a toy car six times throughout the book. One of the cars

was even implemented in the storyline when the main male character decided to bury his toy car

with his pet mouse. This wasn't the only time a vehicle was implemented in the story, though, as

Burleigh's "Good-bye, Sheepie" (2010) utilized both a toy car and a red wagon in the storyline.

The red wagon was illustrated six times throughout the entirety of the book, while the toy car

made an appearance four times. The car, once again, was implemented in the story when the

main character decided to bury it with his pet dog. The inclusion of these vehicles in the

storylines feels awkward and forced. What is more interesting is that these props aren't

implemented in the stories until towards the middle of the storyline when the emotion of the

stories peak, despite these props having unnecessarily been a part of the illustrations from the

beginning. This alludes to idea that these props are being used to keep young boys focussed in

the story. Unsurprisingly, Harris and Burleigh aren't the only ones utilizing toys as props in their

illustrations. Moundlic's "The Scar" (2011) is illustrated with almost thirty toy vehicles for the

male main character. They range from trains to spaceships to cars. Although not a part of the

storyline, these toys make up the majority of the book's background—a background that would

be close to barren without them.

The use of objects to bolster masculine characters isn't the only way props are utilized

throughout the illustrations, though. Most female characters also relied on props to accentuate

their femininity, however, the majority of these objects came in the form of clothing and

accessories. The majority of main female characters are adorned with bows or headbands,

regardless of publication date or character style, alluding to the idea that female characters are

looked at as needing these accessories to enhance and convey their femininity to the audience.

"Saying Goodbye to Lulu" by Corinne Demas (2009) was one of the books that utilized bows in

the character illustrations. Throughout this book, the main female character rarely is depicted

without a bow in her hair, despite being depicted across almost a decade of years. Her bows are

colored to match her already feminine outfits. These feminine outfits consist of mostly skirts and

dresses, with the occasional blouse/overall combination. Demas (2009) isn't the only one to have

used these outfits to convey the feminine ideal, though, as most books, like Prestine's "Someone

Special Died" (1993), confine their female characters to skirts and dresses to enhance and

display the femininity of their female characters.

After analyzing each of these picture books it became increasingly obvious that gender

stereotypes are still exceedingly present, supporting the initial hypothesis. Gender was conveyed

and enhanced utilizing props and clothing that not every male or female child can relate to. These

illustrations can seem so harmless in the background of a children's book, but can actually be

extremely impactful on its audience. Stereotype-enhancing and gender-confirming illustrations

have the potential to lessen the effectiveness of the book by decreasing a child's ability to relate to its content.

Forget About the Females

While some of the books encouraged young girls to appear a certain way or like a certain thing, effectively appealing to gender stereotypes, a few books forgot about females almost completely—a clear indicator of the underrepresentation of women. This underrepresentation has the potential to limit the ability for young females to relate, much like props can, and, especially with grief picture books, can fail to give a young female child the necessary tools they need in order to benefit from the book.

Burleigh's "Good-bye, Sheepie" (2010) is one of the books that almost forgets about female characters. The story is of a young boy whose male dog grows old and dies, and whose dad helps to bury him. The only mention or illustration of any females throughout the book occurs on the second to last page when the shadow of the boy's mother is illustrated. Along with the illustration, the text reads, "Inside the house, Owen's mother was putting the baby to bed" (Burleigh, 2010). Up until that point, the reader has no idea that a mother or baby exist within the storyline. The mention of the mother seems almost an afterthought, as, after that sentence, the storyline starts where it left off with the young boy and his father. By displaying the mother this way, Burleigh (2010) has reduced the female's role within his book to a background caretaker.

Unfortunately, Burleigh's (2010) book isn't the only one that seems to almost forget about women. Himler's "Six Is So Much Less Than Seven" (2002) book also forgets to include women until the end of the book. However, the underrepresentation of women in Himler's

(2002) book is even more severe as the only mention of females is the illustration of a mother cat with her kittens. There is no textual reference to this illustration or the mother cat. There are also no female human characters, even though this book is a human character-type book.

These complete disregards for the inclusiveness of women are the most extreme throughout the coded sample of books. However, many of the coded books showed evidence of underrepresentation by only including a sole female character in a single textual reference, illustrating a female character only once throughout a book, or not illustrating a female character at all and only referencing them. These overt displays of underrepresentation can only serve to limit the audience of these books, as well as, limit the amount of children's grief picture books that are available and relatable for young girls.

Negative Reinforcement of Emotion

Not only are the majority of these grief picture books reinforcing traditional gender roles and stereotypes while under-representing women, but a few are negatively reinforcing the display of emotion for children—something that counteracts the whole intent of grief picture books. The negative reinforcement of emotion in both the text and illustration, contributes to gendered grief by limiting a child's socially acceptable range of emotion. This limit of emotion, affects a child's ability to grieve by limiting what they're allowed to express. Demonstrating the lack of social acceptability of these emotions not only reinforces the child's understanding of how they are not allowed to express certain emotions, but creates this awareness, as well.

The most blatant negative reinforcement of emotion is in the texts of many of the coded picture books. The majority of this negative reinforcement of emotion is geared towards males— a finding in line with the hypothesis. Moundlic's "The Scar" (2011) is one of the books that puts

a negative light on showing emotion. At one point in the book, the phrase, "It hurt a bit and I tried not to cry" (Moundlic, 2011) was uttered by the male main character. This same character spends the entirety of the book attempting not to feel sadness over the loss of his mother. There is a scene within the book when the character does end up crying, despite his best efforts not to, saying, "the tears flow without stopping, and there's nothing I can do" (Moundlic, 2011). These scenes communicate to young children, specifically boys, that it is socially expected that they hide their tears or do not feel sadness.

Another type of negative reinforcement of emotion is displayed within Burleigh's "Good-bye, Sheepie" (2010). When Owen, the main character, has to say goodbye to his beloved dog, the text reads, "Owen felt tears well up, and he looked away" (Burleigh, 2010). This demonstrates a presence of shame in Owen when he begins to feel emotional. The feeling of shame when experiencing and displaying emotion is not the only instance where this occurred. In Walsh's "Sammy in the Sky" (2011), the main character says, "My father turned away so I wouldn't see the tears in his eyes". While Burleigh's (2010) book showed a young boy feeling shameful for his emotions, Walsh's (2011) book embeds shame into an older man's display of emotions. This aura of guilt surrounding the male expression of emotions communicates, even more than Moundlic's (2011) book does, that display emotion is socially unacceptable for young boys and men.

By allowing children's grief picture books to illustrate emotion as something negative, a child's understanding of emotion and when they are allowed to feel the way that they feel is impacted. Since these books specifically address male emotions, it can be reasoned that males will be more affected by the limit of emotions—a phenomenon that we've witnessed in prior

research. Moreover, the limiting of socially acceptable emotions for males is likely to impact

how a male grieves, thereby effectively enhancing or creating gendered grief.

Gendered Explanations

In addition to emotion being limited within the coded children's grief picture books, the

explanation of death, itself, seemed to be gendered. Questions posed throughout these picture

books were often answered by adult character's whose responses seemed to be limited by their

gender. By conveying the understanding of dying in a way that comes across as gendered, these

books are contributing to the idea that men and women experience and understand death and

grieving differently. This also limits how a child interprets how they, themselves, are to

understand death and grieving, by giving the characters that they can relate to and learn from

only one type of death explanation.

Questions were posed quite frequently across a multitude of the coded children's picture

books, however, Portnoy's "Where Do People Go When They Die?" (2004) book is based on

questions about death, dying and grieving. This book contains one question—where people go

when they die—and a multitude of characters answer the question. The male characters

throughout Portnoy's (2004) book say things like, "They are buried in the ground", "They

become the past", and "They become the future". The male characters in Portnoy's (2004) book

focus on more biological answers or logical answers focused on our memories and how those

memories impact the characters going forward. The female characters, on the other hand, tend to

give more abstract, religious answers like, "They go to heaven, a place of peace", "They go into

our hearts", and "They go to God" (Portnoy, 2004). By separating out what males and females

believe, Portnoy's (2004) book has effectively limited a child's understanding of death.

Moreover, this separation of death explanation along the lines of gender is an overt reference to the already-present gendered grief and its impact.

On Being Gender Neutral

Although most of the children's grief picture books coded within this study contained themes representing stereotypes, gender roles, underrepresentation, or gendered grief, a few books made attempts at gender neutrality in different ways. Some books included a lot of characters with varying interests and personalities. Some of these books, because of this aspect, failed to have an overt main character, but, instead, a group of main characters that have the potential to relate to more children.

Brown's "Dead Bird" (1995) is among the most gender neutral. Despite having three male characters and one female character, Brown (1995) creates a book free from gendered grief by utilizing a group of characters rather than a main character. Through selective use of pronouns and nouns like "they", "the children" and "we", Brown (1995) includes all four of the characters every time an action takes place. This use of a group of characters, rather than an overt main character, is also present in Varley's "Badger's Parting Gifts" (1992) and Durant's "Always and Forever" (2003) where groups of animals mourn the loss of an animal friend. While both of these books maintains a wide variety of characters, allowing for more inclusion, each character is addressed separately. This allows for things like gender stereotypes and roles to be more present than they are in Brown's "Dead Bird" (1995). Still, though, these books go farther than many of the other books do in terms of attempting to include a wider variety of gender expressions.

Raschka's book "The Purple Balloon" (2012) is unlike any other, though, and is the epitome of genderless grief books. There are no gender references throughout the entirety of

"The Purple Balloon" (2012). The storyline includes words like "someone", "anyone" and "no one", as well as list of different kinds of people like doctors, parents, and friends, to illustrate the idea that death is hard, but that it's better when other people are there for you. The characters are balloons without gendered features, but are still personified with human characteristics like eyes and mouths. This gender neutral approach to grief picture books is beneficial and revolutionary for readers, as it allows them to relate to the book's themes regardless of gender, without influencing a child's gender schema or introducing stereotypes or gender roles.

It becomes abundantly clear, after analyzing and coding many grief picture books, that authoring a book without gender roles, stereotypes and underrepresentation that doesn't contribute to the problem of gendered grief is entirely possible. It also becomes clear that the books that do maintain certain levels of gender roles, stereotypes and underrepresentation pose risks to the children who need them. They influence cognitive schema and views on emotional social acceptability, while creating and enhancing gendered grief.

Discussion

Gendered grief is an incredibly intricate social phenomenon that has the potential to limit and control the emotional range of most American individuals. The children's grief picture books included in this study are a small section of a much larger system that needs to be addressed. At this stage, very little is known about how gendered emotion and grief is created or perpetuated, or how it can be eradicated. What we do know, though, is that the gender stereotypes, gender roles, and the underrepresentation of both men and women needs to be addressed, not only in children's grief picture books but across all media types.

The Future of Gendered Grief

After coding and analyzing the children's grief picture books within this study, it becomes abundantly apparent that gender stereotypes and gender roles maintain their permeability in modern American children's grief picture books. It was initially hypothesized that males would strictly adhere to gender roles and stereotypes in both language and illustration, that women would use more emotional language and be underrepresented overall, and that men would be underrepresented in highly emotionalized situations. Each of these hypotheses were not only supported, but additional support for the continuation and creation of gendered grief was revealed.

The findings of this research indicate that, at best, the future holds an extraordinary uphill battle for those combating against sexism and social gender differences, specifically gendered grief. The stereotypes, gender roles and underrepresentation of both men and women in children's grief picture books poses a problem to all those influence by modern American culture by impacting how they grieve and process emotion. It is for this reason that we can hope that more books like "The Purple Balloon" (Raschka, 2012) will be available for children to help them cope with loss. These genderless books can take complex emotions and attribute them to humans rather than to specific genders, creating a standard where both young girls and boys can learn to express emotion healthily and freely as they age. Perhaps, one day, books free of sexism, including underrepresentation, stereotypes and gender roles, will become the norm.

Conclusions

Since the children's grief picture books used within this study are often implemented in bibliotherapy, as well as by parents to help console their child after a loss, it is of the up-most

importance that these professionals, educators and parents are aware of what they can do to

better serve the children experiencing grief. It is also important to provide future researchers with

the questions and tools they need to expand upon the current knowledge in the field, in order to

get a clearer picture of gendered grief, and how it is created, perpetuated and can be eradicated.

Recommendations

The best course of action for professionals, educators and parents to take going forward

would be to implement a wide variety of children's grief picture books in their practices. It is

extremely important that each person becomes aware of the strengths and weaknesses of each of

the utilized books and attempts to make the best choice for the child or children involved. By

implementing a genderless book, children are at little risk for sexism influences, however, those

books may be too impersonal for a child to gain meaning from them. Other options would be to

implement books that utilize multiple main characters with varying levels of gender expression.

In the end, communicating to children that emotion should be expressed both equally and openly

should be of top priority when working through the grief process in a healthy manner.

Limitations and Future Research

Since this research is limited by the fact that it was conducted by a single coder and is of

small sample size, future research should aspire to increase the amount of books and coders. This

research is also limited by the fact that it takes a very general overview of the books to set a

starting point for future research. This future research should endeavor to look at specific aspects

of sexism and underrepresentation in order to gain a better grasp on what the current trends in

children's grief literature are. Other future research should also focus on the impact of and

impacting of gendered grief in other aspects of American culture.

Given that the topic of gendered grief is a new field, this research becomes exceedingly important when moving forward. Taking a look at popular children's grief books creates a spring-board for future research by examining the heart of what children are exposed to. We have learned that the creation and continuation of gendered grief correlate with children's grief picture books. This knowledge serves to benefit future researchers, while also spurring others to seek out knowledge in this field. The importance of continuing this research cannot be overstated, as the futures of those experiencing grief, as well as, of the educators and counselors who work diligently to minimize the negative effects of that grief, depend on the research on this topic in order to continue to live a healthy, happy life. While gendered grief is not something that can be overlooked, it is something that can be impacted with the help of future researchers.

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Appendix

Coding Sheet:

Title:	
Author:	
Illustrator:	
Main Character Gender:	
Number of Main Character Depictions:	
Number of Male Characters:	
Number of Male Depictions:	
Number of Female Characters:	
Number of Female Depictions:	

Masculine Traits	Presence of Trait	Feminine Traits	Presence of Trait
Adventurous		Affectionate	
Aggressive		Emotionally Expressive	
Argumentative		Impetuous	
Assertive		Nurturing	
Competitive		Panicky	
Decisive		Passive	
Risk-Taker		Tender	
Self-Reliant		Understanding	

Coding Sheet (Continued):

Traits	Female Depicting Trait	Male Depicting Trait
Interest/Excitement		
Enjoyment/Joy		
Surprise/Astonishment		
Sadness		
Anger		
Disgust/Contempt		
Fear/Anxiety		
Shyness		
Shame		
Guilt/Conscience/Morality		
Like/Love		