



Dick and Jane as Victims: Sex Stereotyping in Children's Readers

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One early source of the messages children receive is their elementary school readers. These readers abound in stereotypes. The typical girl in any reader is a frilly little thing with a smile on her pretty face and a passive attitude toward life. The boy portrayed in the reader has a look of stern concentration: he is busy preparing to be a "man". Mothers and fathers in the readers reflect a simple standardized existence, which becomes for the child reader the American Way of Life. What is at specific issue in our study of current readers is the way in which girls are portrayed in these stories -- the activities in which they engage, the attitudes they display, the way in which people treat them, the generalizations which are made about them, and the directions for future life and work which are offered to them -- as contrasted with the treatment of boys, whether contemporary or historical -- their activities, their ambitions, their hopes and dreams, and their ultimate objectives. The degree to which the treatment of boys and girls differs offers a perspective on the current social expectations for each sex, as transmitted by primary school texts to readers, and some insight as to the premises underlying these expectations.

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