

Chapter 5

Discussion

Findings Summary

From the research, the typical stereotypes of males are reflected through the use of specific verbal and visual language. Male protagonists are portrayed as active, adventure-oriented, aggressive and independent characters. The word choices describing the action, aggression, violence, risk and amusement are applied to explain the male characters. On the contrary, the female characters in Thai contemporary books appear as passive, not at all aggressive, home-oriented and dependent characters. Word choices describing the beauty, cuteness, newness, cleanliness and being communicative are applied to explain female characters

Discussion

Psychologically, a set of beliefs and opinions about males and females and about the purported qualities of masculinity and femininity, which are called gender ideologies, are viewed largely as social constructs. Beliefs about gender become the culture's stereotypes of women and men leading to social roles assigned to women and men. The stereotypes function as parts of gender role expectation. People learn them and are influenced by them. It is likely that belief in the stereotypes may result in social manner expectations. Stereotypes operate by setting up a self-fulfilling prophecy. For example, if females are viewed as having passive characteristics, some females may view themselves this way and develop those characteristics. Such beliefs can vigorously influence members of society in either a negative or a positive way. If children believe in positive expectation, they develop their positive behavior. When they believe in negative expectation, they develop their negative behavior. [Basow, 1992; 11]

Furthermore, another way gender stereotypes affect girls and boys is through impression management. Most human beings, at some level want to be accepted by others. We try to behave and present ourselves in a way that we think is acceptable to other people. [Basow, 1992; 12] The impact of this process on boys and girls is that their roles are already defined by society and thereby shape their self-representation. These social expectations can control the mannerisms of children. The repeated behavior occurring in the community forces others to believe and behave it over and over again. To illustrate these expectations, imagine that we know nothing else about a person except she is female. We are likely to guess that she is expressive, nurturant, dependent and so forth. These assumptions probably show the expected attitudes towards females, when in fact, that woman may be not at all expressive, nurturant nor dependent.

Stereotypes are strongly held overgeneralizations about people. Such beliefs tend to be shared within the society and are learned as part of the process of growing up in that society. Consequently, such a belief which is carried on by socialization agents, for instance, parents, school, religion and media shape the way we perceive and evaluate others. [Basow, 1992; 128] A number of research studies have used media as the source to study gender stereotypes. Females and males are presented in a stereotypical way. Even in children's TV programs, children perceive the gender stereotypes and male-orientation. The mannerisms of females and males are strikingly different. Male characters are more likely than female characters to be aggressive, constructive, direct and helpful and to be rewarded for their actions. Males get more attention and reinforcement while females are usually ignored and are expected to be passive and sedate. [Basow, 1992; 158] Gender stereotypes concerning personal traits are also present in printed media. Children's books markedly portray boys and girls in stereotypical ways. Male characters tend to predominate while the females are usually helpless or dependent on males. Furthermore, themes relating to aggression and adventures are used in books for boys. All this corresponds with the findings of male characters in Thai contemporary books in which males appear as the adventurous, independent characters while females appear as not at all adventurous and dependent characters.

As we have seen above, rather than reflecting real behavioral differences, these media are more likely to portray the stereotypes of both genders. It is also noticed that stereotypes are oversimplification systems, so they may not be true for the group as a whole. Therefore, some males or females may be treated unfairly because people believe in the oversimplified beliefs about typical males and females. The gender biases are the social phenomena in which males and females are treated differently. The impact of the different treatments of males and females can be positive, negative and neutral. In situation where the impact is negative, the more specific term 'discrimination' is used. However, feminists asserted that the gender bias is separation of gender in the way, which prefers one gender, most often males, over the other and that causes discrimination in the society against women. By studying both verbal and nonverbal language are we better able to explain how gender bias exists and proceeds in the community. [Marinova, 2003; 2-3]

Language can reflect the prejudices that people have within themselves. From the analysis, it is found that the gender biases in Thai contemporary books for boys and girls are portrayed through a form of gender stereotypes. By letting stereotypes set up self-fulfilling prophecy, the gender belief which reflects gender bias will continue to exist in the community endlessly. Even worse, if children believe in negative expectations, they develop those very characteristics, which lead them to be treated even more biasedly in the community. For example, girls are told that they are dependent, and they will grow up believing that girls have to be dependent, which is not always true. It should not be necessary for them to behave as the constructed stereotype.

Most research on gender stereotypes is focused on personal traits or mannerisms. However, not only can one talk about masculine and feminine traits, but one can also talk about masculine and feminine roles. From the findings, the roles and the responsibilities of males and females can show the gender bias in the community. In this research, some male characters act as leaders or kings and some are heads of the family. These gender roles correspond with the mannerisms and interests of males who are portrayed to be concerned about power and dominance. Noticeably, the females' role is caretaker of children. Female supporting characters in both books for boys and girls are presented in the home in the role of mother and wife. They are responsible for the chores and the rearing their children. There are many research studies that give reasons why females

relate to the nurturing mannerism, for instance, females make contact with a newborn during critical periods after birth. Females are usually given nurturing behaviors, for example, playing with dolls and baby-sitting. Besides, the gender expectations or gender stereotypes force females to be responsible for the nurturing role. That is because women are likely to be in nurturant roles in our society, for instance, mothers, wives, nurses, and social workers. [Basow, 1992; 64] In fact, females are not naturally more nurturant than males. However, females are expected to be more nurturant than males and are more likely to be in nurturing roles. [Basow, 1992; 63-64]

Writers of these Thai contemporary books for boys and girls do not intend to harm or misjudge the boys and girls. But because the writers themselves have been taught to have gender stereotypical expectations. When they describe the male or female characters in children's books, they unconsciously bring out the stereotype of each gender to describe them. For example, Punnipa Pumiwat the female author of *The Wonderful Present from the Fairy* describes Little boy as an independent, aggressive and adventurous male character. She probably describes the male character unconsciously and does not intend praise or look down upon males. Male writers also often describes the male protagonist as an aggressive character, for example Rawee Nimmanakiart used verbs of action showing the anger of the Little Lion in *The Little Lion* to display male characteristics. Moreover, both males and female authors, themselves describe the female protagonist as dependent and submissive.

Gender ideologies are carried on within society through language used, communication and media. The repetitions of these events are propagation of gender stereotypes to people. Media is an important socialization agents which represent and reinforce the idea of gender stereotyping. The images we see portrayed by the media reflect our cultural understanding of gender and reflect the societal view of what males and females should be. The current study presents that both women and men are represented stereotypically and additionally, women are underrepresented in media. Therefore, it is not strange if Thai children nowadays still behave in stereotypical mannerisms. That is because they grow up in a community filled with media. Media represents repeatedly the expectation of gender appropriateness. Media, especially children's literature, still presents children in a stereotypical way. Moreover, parents bring them up in stereotypical

environments and provide stereotypical treatments. Therefore, studying the impact of language used in every type of communication will create awareness in the media receivers. The understanding on how gender bias is constructed and shapes people's perception will help us to pay more careful attention in consuming media.



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