

10-2013

## Socializing Young Readers: A Content Analysis of Body Size Images in Caldecott Medal Winners

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### Recommended Citation

Wedwick, L., & Latham, N. (2013). Socializing Young Readers: A Content Analysis of Body Size Images in Caldecott Medal Winners. *Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts*, 52 (4). Retrieved from [https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading\\_horizons/vol52/iss4/3](https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading_horizons/vol52/iss4/3)

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## **SOCIALIZING YOUNG READERS: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF BODY SIZE IMAGES IN CALDECOTT MEDAL WINNERS**

**Dr. Linda Wedwick, Dr. Nancy Latham**

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### **Abstract**

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Many studies have examined gender issues in children's literature, but a review of the literature reveals that few studies have examined the instances of fatness in the images. Studying the fat representation in the images of children's literature is important because exposure to a variety of body types may slow the rate of children's body dissatisfaction. The present study examines exposure to body size images in picture books. Results of this content analysis indicate that there are fewer books with fat characters when compared to those without. However, when examining every image of body size within each text, there is a considerably larger number of non-fat images than fat images that readers are exposed to.

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## Introduction

When you think about books that touched you as a young child, do you visualize the images, or do you think about the words? Can you see the grass around the little house in *The Little House* by Virginia Lee Burton? The colors created a peacefulness that took over no matter what went on around the house. Consider *Make Way for Ducklings* by Robert McCloskey, what are the memorable aspects of that book? For us, our clearest vision is of the police officer, his urgency to stop traffic as the ducks confidently cross the street. We have read this book aloud to many students as well. Their observations of the other images include the loudness of the whistle, the noise of the traffic screeching to a halt, and the curiosity of the strangers on the street. Miguel, a 4-year-old boy in a Pre-K classroom, worried that the whistle would scare the baby ducks. Sarah, a 5-year-old in the same classroom, laughed, "Look at his fat cheeks!" The text does not describe these inferences; however, the children use these images to experience the story as constructed by the illustrator. This may be because the images and the text work together in the experience of meaning making that is more than the sum of its parts (Kiefer, 2008).

Of course, the stories themselves are memorable, but the pictures leave a lasting impression. Kiefer (2008) explains that the pictures invoke an affective response because the reader brings an emotional association to the elements of the artwork. If these illustrations are that powerful, the lasting power that allows us to remember into adulthood, then how do these illustrations contribute to our understanding of the world around us? What messages in these lasting images form our idea of reality? Considering the impact that illustrations have on young readers, it is no surprise that a prestigious award exists to recognize outstanding illustrations in picture books.

Caldecott winners are often studied by researchers, and these particular picture books have a predominant place in classrooms. Critical studies of Caldecott winners have examined the portrayal of old people (Dellman-Jenkins & Yang, 1997), perceptions of gender (Frawley, 2008), readability levels (Chamberlain & Leal, 1999), and the images of females, minorities, and the aged (Hurley & Chadwick, 1998). Gender is by far the most common focus of the studies involving Caldecott books. For example, Davis and McDaniel (1999) examined the instances of gender portrayal in Caldecott winners from 1972 through 1997. Their purpose was to follow up on Czaplinski's (1972) study that also counted instances of each gender in both text and pictures of Caldecott winners from 1940 through 1971. The Davis and McDaniel study found that the instances of female

characters in pictures dropped from 48 percent identified in the Czaplinski study to 40 percent.

### **Young Children and Critical Literacy**

The present study takes a critical literacy stance in its examination of children's literature. Although, critical literacy often analyzes political, economic, and social contexts, this study specifically focuses on the social and cultural constructions of body size images both present and not present within texts. Beck (2005) suggests that texts and language are not neutral, and the current study found that neither are images. Hollindale (1988) describes children's literature as inescapably didactic, and other researchers have asserted a similar claim (Apol, 1998; Nodelman, 1999; Boutte, 2002). All texts position readers (Bourke, 2008), but Nodelman (1999) suggests that "picture books are a significant means by which we integrate young children into the ideology of our culture" (p. 73). Critical literacy would suggest that the reader endures a power relationship between that which is privileged by the author or illustrator and the reader's own background and experiences. For example, the privileging of one ideal body type reinforces the dominant social and cultural ideology and creates an image of power that is constructed through the interaction with the text/author and the reader.

One goal of critical literacy is to examine the privileged ideology by asking critical questions about what or who is missing. What group is without a voice? When teachers model this critical practice, students will become critical readers. Without critical pedagogy, inexperienced, young readers may not be able to identify on their own the overt and covert ideological underpinnings in texts and images. Nodelman (1999) believed that the intended audience (young readers) of children's literature is inexperienced and uses the pictures to make sense of the text to construct an understanding of their world. However, Styles and Arizpe (2001) found in their study that both fluent and below average readers were "capable of subtle and engaged analysis of visual texts" (p. 280). Images, such as those in the picture books that teachers read aloud, and young children read on their own, can be deceiving to young readers. It is assumed that the pictures in these books make visual the words from the text but also represent the actual world (Nodelman, 1999). The enabling environment that Styles and Arizpe (2001) created in their study allowed the children to read the images critically. The environment consisted of an experienced adult reader, an emphasis on talk and image, questions that supported critical thinking, and a high quality text. This

critical pedagogy allowed what Nodelman would call the inexperienced reader to engage in image analysis. Similarly, when individual readers encounter multiple perspectives, critical thinking is more likely to occur and the possibility for understanding the human experience increases (Pace, 2006).

Engagement in critical image analysis by the inexperienced reader also has social justice implications. Dever, Sorenson, and Broderick (2005) describe children's books as a "bridge or way to vicariously experience social justice situations" (p.19). For the young child, this bridge to understanding social justice and discrimination is also built by images as well as text. The consistent disregard of any group based on a physical characteristic is problematic and impacts how one constructs concepts, such as ideal body size. These narrowly defined constructions manifest themselves into accepted habits of intolerance and discrimination over time. Galda and Beach (2001) suggest that researchers "need to examine how students acquire interpretive and social practices over time through participation in particular types of communities of practice" (p. 67). The community of practice in this study could be, for example, the traditional read-aloud in the early childhood classroom. In these communities, children experience the over exposure of one body size and the underexposure of others.

#### Young Children and Body Image Dissatisfaction

Studying body size specifically in the images of children's literature is important because exposure to more realistic body types and larger body types may slow the rate of children's body image dissatisfaction. According to the Centers for Disease Control from 1978-2008, "childhood obesity" increased from 5.0% to 10.4% for children aged two to five years, 6.5% to 19.6% for children six to eleven years, and 5.0% to 18.1% for adolescents aged 12 to 19 years (Childhood Overweight and Obesity, p. 1). These statistics suggest that children will see an increasing variance of body type both in their classroom and in the world around them. If there is a disconnect between the body size images in picture books and other media and the variety of body sizes in the world around them, children may experience body image dissatisfaction.

Researchers more recently began to investigate how early children internalize body size stereotypes and experience body image dissatisfaction. Body image studies, such as those conducted by Birbeck and Drummond (2005) and Tiggemann (2001), used images to determine young children's understanding of body image. In their study involving eight young girls between five and seven years, Birbeck and Drummond (2005) found that the six and seven year olds demonstrated body image dissatisfaction more readily than five year olds.

Tiggemann (2001) reports that by six years old, girls already have developed a desire to be thin, and Cramer and Steinwert (1998) claim that even four- and five-year-olds show a dislike for large body images. In Dittmar, Halliwell, and Ive (2006), young girls were more likely to report body dissatisfaction after being exposed to images of Barbie than after exposure to images of Emme, a doll with a larger body size. Furthermore, “if negative effects can be demonstrated after a single exposure to images of Barbie dolls, then repeated exposure is likely to be more damaging” (Dittmar, Halliwell, & Ive, 2006). The question remains whether equal exposure to images of body types like Barbie and body types like Emme in texts and media would lessen the aversion to fatness.

### Design for a Critical Analysis

Both Dittmar, Halliwell, and Ive’s (2006) study and Tiggemann’s (2001) study suggest more research on body image and body dissatisfaction is needed on younger children, rather than just on those who have already internalized social constructions like fat and thin. We believe that understanding the rate or frequency of exposure to diverse body size images will lead to a better understanding of what is perceived to be valued and de-valued, privileged and marginalized, tolerated and unaccepted.

The present study examines exposure to body size images, particularly fat images in picture books and extends a previous study of fat representations and stereotypes in adolescent fiction (Wedwick, 2005). In this study *fat* and *not fat* are used as neutral descriptors of body size. Because body image is socially and culturally constructed, and this construct may be different across cultures (Birbeck & Drummond, 2003) *fat* images in this study were identified at the book level using a comparative structural analysis. For each book, images of *fat* characters were identified as those drawn larger in comparison to other characters drawn in the book. The images in Figures 1-4 help to illustrate the comparative structure used for determining *fat* and *not fat* descriptors. For example, in *Duffy and the Devil* (Zemach, 1973), all characters in the book are drawn with round body types, especially in comparison to how characters are drawn in other texts (see Figure 1).

However, because all of the characters are drawn large and round, there is no comparative structure within the text. Therefore, no characters in this book are counted as *fat*. In *Oxcart Man* (Hall, 1979), however, the illustrations create a comparative structure by showing variance in the body images (see Figure 2).

Figure 1: Duffy and the Devil



Figure 2: Ox-Cart Man



The images on the left of the page are drawn with thinner features than the images on the right. Therefore, in this particular image, the researchers were able to affirm that a *fat* image exists in this book. Both *Make Way for Ducklings* (McCloskey, 1941) (see Figure 3) and *Officer Buckle and Gloria* (Rathmann, 1995) (see Figure 4) further ground the notion of a comparative structure for determining *fat* and *not fat* descriptors.

Figure 3: Make Way for Duclings



Figure 4: Officer Buckle and Gloria





This comparative structure was used to answer the following research questions.

1. How prevalent are *fat* images in literature for young children, specifically Caldecott Award Winning books?
2. How has the prevalence of *fat* images changed over time?
3. Is there any gender variance of *fat* images?
4. Is there a connection between body size and character role?

### **Critical Image Analysis Method**

This study used a content analysis approach to identify the prevalence of *fat* images in Caldecott winners. Fraenkel and Wallen (2000) suggest that a content analysis provides an indirect way to study a group's communication because a "group's conscious and unconscious beliefs, attitudes, values, and ideas are often revealed in their communication" (p. 469). A content analysis can take the form of a conceptual analysis or a relational analysis. The conceptual analysis examines the existence and frequency of concepts in a text (Busch, De Maret, Flynn, Kellum, Le, Meyers, Saunders, White, and Palmquist, 2005). For example, Robson (2001) examined economics textbook to determine the number of references relating to race, ethnicity, and gender (REG). Robson counted the number of pages in the textbook containing the words Blacks, African Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans, Asian Americans, race, sex, minorities, women, gender, female, single/welfare mothers, and any variation of these words. Relational analysis goes beyond examining the presence or frequency of a particular concept by exploring the relationships between the concepts. For example, McCabe (1996) conducted a relational analysis of fifth grade social studies textbooks by exploring the semantic structure of a sentence containing either "African-American" or "black."

This study utilizes elements of both a conceptual analysis and a relational analysis. We collected 71 Caldecott medal winners from 1938-2008 to determine how many books contained *fat* images. Additionally, we wanted to investigate emerging trends relative to time, gender, and roles in the *fat* images. A data form was completed separately on each book by each researcher. The data form included book title, author, illustrator, genre, year published, and an analysis of all illustrated characters in the book. In this first round of analysis, we documented the existence of a *fat* image within each book by indicating yes or no on the data form. If a *fat* image was present within the book, we further documented the gender and role of that *fat* character. Both researchers then compared their data forms to confirm inter-rater reliability. Because we used the comparative structure

(described above) of *fat* and *not fat* at the book level to code, the researcher's personal constructions/notions of *fat* and *not fat* did not influence their coding. Therefore, there was 99 percent agreement on the number of books that contained at least one image of a *fat* character. Additionally, the researchers were consistent with their labels of roles for the *fat* characters, requiring very little debate of category names for the roles.

The role was documented as occupation or function in the illustrations. Because there are so many roles represented in children's literature, roles were first labeled and then collapsed into broader categories of like roles once patterns emerged. Table 1 explains how roles were sorted into categories. Categories consisted of Royalty, Military, Professional, Policeman, Townspeople, and Other.

Table 1: Role Categories

<b>Role Category</b>	<b>Original Codes</b>
Royalty	King, queen, prince, princess
Military	General, knight
Professional	Nurser, waiter, teacher, baker, janitor, dancer, miller, construction worker, merchant, conductor, dentist, principal, president, street cleaner, salesperson, agent, tailor, corn planter, pot maker, arrow maker
Police Officer	Policeman, security guard
People Groups	Villagers, crowds, tribesmen, townspeople
Other	Sorcerer, witch, Santa, traveler, burglar, hermit

The single role category of Policeman was designated because a pattern emerged early in the data collection that many police officers were drawn larger than other characters, so we chose to analyze this role separately. Gender was categorized as Female (mom, girl, grandma, maiden, sister, woman) and Male (boy, dad, grandpa, brother, man). Animal characters were not coded into role categories and gender categories. Data collected were then numerically coded and transferred into SPSS. Frequency counts were used to identify trends in the literature.

After this initial data collection and analysis, the researchers began their second level of data collection in order to compare the total instances or exposures of *fat* and *not fat* images in the illustrations. In light of the findings from previous studies of young children's responses to body image pictures, we

wanted to determine the overall frequency of exposure of *fat* images to *not fat* images that exists in these popular read alouds in early elementary classrooms. In this second round of data collection, we counted every image that we could differentiate, including all characters in a crowd scene as long as body image could be distinguished. Again, the comparative structure of body size at the book level was used for this data collection process. The researchers made every effort not to count a character more than one time in subsequent pages; however, it is possible that duplicate counting may have occurred. Even though this is a limitation to the study, the possibility of duplicative counting could have occurred for both *fat* and *not fat* images. These data were also numerically coded and entered into SPSS for analysis and frequency counts.

### The Prevalence of Fat Images

Based on the research questions, the data provided a clear perspective on both the presence and absence of diverse body sizes depicted in Caldecott medal winners. Research question one addressed the prevalence of *fat* images within the illustrations. Table 2 illustrates the number of books that contained at least one fat image. Of the 71 books examined, 29 (40 percent) of them had at least one illustration of a *fat* character when body size was compared at the book level.

Table 2: Instances of Fatness within Total Image Count

Year	Title/Author	Total Fat Images	Total Not Fat Images	Total Character Images
1938	Animals of the Bible, A Picture Book (Fish)	0	23	23
1939	Mei LI (Handforth)	1	274	275
1940	Abraham Lincoln (d'Aulaire)	3	234	237
1941	They Were Strong and Good (Lawson)	2	74	76
1942	Make Way for Ducklings (McCloskey)	1	89	90
1943	The Little House (Burton)	3	337	340
1944	Many Moons (Thurber)	2	15	17
1945	Prayer for a Child (Field)	0	74	74
1946	The Rooster Crows (Petersham)	0	126	126
1947	The Little Island (Brown)	0	2	2
1948	White Snow, Bright Snow (Tresselt)	1	13	14
1949	The Big Snow (Hader)	0	2	2
1950	Song of the Swallows (Politi)	0	22	22
1951	The Egg Tree (Milhous)	1	31	32

Year	Title/Author	Total Fat Images	Total Not Fat Images	Total Character Images
1952	Finders Keepers (Lipkind)	1	2	3
1953	The Biggest Bear (Ward)	0	17	17
1954	Madeline's Rescue (Bemelmans)	12	96	108
1955	Cinderella, or the Little Glass Slipper (Perrault)	2	30	32
1956	Frog Went A-Courtin' (Langstaff)	0	0	0
1957	A Tree is Nice (Udry)	2	34	36
1958	Time of Wonder (McCloskey)	0	31	31
1959	Chantideer and the Fox (Cooney)	0	3	3
1960	Nine Days to Christmas (Ets)	10	68	78
1961	Babushka and the Three Kings (Robbins)	0	16	16
1962	Once a Mouse (Brown)	0	1	1
1963	The Snowy Day (Keats)	1	1	2
1964	Where the Wild Things Are (Sendak)	0	1	1
1965	May I Bring a Friend (Schenk)	0	3	3
1966	Always Room for One More (Leodhas)	2	80	82
1967	Sam, Bangs, & Moonshine (Ness)	0	4	4
1968	Drummer Hoff (Emberley)	1	6	7
1969	The Fool of the World and the Flying Shi (Ransome)	3	130	133
1970	Sylvester and the Magic Pebble (Steig)	0	0	0
1971	A Story A Story (Haley)	0	54	54
1972	One Fine Day (Hogrogain)	0	5	5
1973	The Funny Little Woman (Mosel)	0	8	8
1974	Duffy and he Devil (Zemach)	0	46	46
1975	Arrow to the Sun (McDermutt)	1	14	15
1976	Why Mosquitos Buzz in Peoples Ears (Aardema)	0	1	1
1977	Ashnati to Zulu (Musgrove)	2	142	144
1978	Noah's Ark (Spier)	0	24	24
1979	The Girl Who Loved Wild Horses (Goble)	0	23	23
1980	Ox Cart Man (Hall)	5	27	32
1981	Fables (Lobel)	0	0	0
1982	Jumanji (Allsburg)	0	6	6
1983	Shadow (Brown)	0	49	49
1984	The Glorious Flight (Provensen)	2	167	169

Year	Title/Author	Total <i>Fat</i> Images	Total <i>Not Fat</i> Images	Total Character Images
1985	Saint George and the Dragon (Hodges)	2	60	62
1986	The Polar Express (Allsburg)	1	29	30
1987	Hey Al (Yorinks)	0	1	1
1988	Owl Moon (Yolen)	0	2	2
1989	Song and Dance Man (Ackerman)	1	3	4
1990	Lon Po Po (Young)	0	4	4
1991	Black and White (Maculay)	1	53	54
1992	Tuesday (Wiesner)	0	10	10
1993	Mirette on the High Wire (McCulley)	5	48	53
1994	Grandfather's Journey (Say)	0	28	28
1995	Smokey Night (Bunting)	0	21	21
1996	Officer Buckle & Gloria (Rathmann)	2	142	144
1997	Golem (Wisniewski)	0	11	11
1998	Rapunzel (Zelinsky)	0	12	12
1999	Snowflake Bentley (Martin)	0	26	26
2000	Joseph had a Little Overcoat (Taback)	7	57	64
2001	So You Want to be President (St. George)	4	144	148
2002	The Three Pigs (Wiesner)	0	0	0
2003	My Friend Rabbit (Rohmann)	0	0	0
2004	The Man Who Walked Between the Towers (Gerstein)	3	48	51
2005	Kitten's First Full Moon (Henkes)	0	0	0
2006	The Hello, Goodbye Window (Juster)	1	6	7
2007	Flotsam (Wiesner)	0	19	19
2008	The Invention of Hugo Cabret (Selznick)	0	131	131
<b>Total Number of Character Images (n=3345)</b>		<b>85</b>	<b>3260</b>	<b>3345</b>
<b>Percent of Images</b>		<b>3%</b>	<b>97%</b>	

When examining these frequency counts from Table 2, clearly there are more books that do not have a *fat* image (60 percent) than those that do (40 percent). However, counting the existence of one image in a book does not reveal the rate of exposure that we ultimately wanted to determine from this content analysis. Therefore, the second round of data collection and analysis looked at the overall exposure of *fat* images to *not fat* images to investigate the frequency of exposure to a variety of body types.

Using the same comparative structure to determine *fat* and *not fat*, the researchers counted every body image illustrated on each page of all 71 books. Table 3 shows that when using frequency counts of all body images within the 71 books, there is a considerably larger number of *not fat* images (3260) than *fat* images (85) that readers are exposed to.

Table 3: Decade Ranking of Presence of Fat Images

Decade	<i>Fat Body Image</i>	<i>Not Fat Body Image</i>	Chance of Exposure to <i>Fat Image</i>
1940's	12	966	1%
1950's	18	266	6.7%
1960's	17	309	5%
1970's	3	317	.9%
1980's	11	344	3.1%
1990's	8	355	2.2%
2000's	15	405	3.7%

These findings create a different perspective by which to consider how children internalize the social constructs of a culture. With only three percent exposure to *fat* body images, the Caldecott winners may be contributing to children's body image dissatisfaction. When you consider Dittmar, et.al (2006) findings that a single exposure to Barbie had a negative effect, what will be the damage of 97 percent exposure to *not fat* images and three percent exposure to *fat* images?

### How Has the Prevalence of Fat Images Changed Over Time?

To answer research question two, the researchers examined the books over time to see if any trends emerged in regard to prevalence of *fat* images and the date of publication. Although not predominate, trends of *fat* images emerged as a result of the data analysis. Table 4 illustrates the number of *fat* images compiled by decade along with the chance of a child being exposed to a *fat* image when viewing Caldecott winners.

Table 4: Gender Breakdown of Fat Images

	<i>Fat Character</i>		<i>Female</i>		<i>Male</i>	
	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Fat</b>	<b>Not Fat</b>	<b>Fat</b>	<b>Not Fat</b>
<b>Total Number (n=71)</b>	29	42	19	37	49	39
<b>Percent of Books</b>	41%	59%	34%	66%	33%	67%

This analysis indicates that books awarded in the 1950's contained the greatest likelihood that a child would be exposed to *fat* images (6.7 percent), and Caldecott winners from the 1970's present the least number of fat images across the decade with the chance of exposure less than one percent. When comparing more currently awarded books with the earliest awarded books, there is little difference. Regardless of this difference from 1950 to 1970, the first three decades combined and the last three decades combined show the similar rate of exposure (3 percent and 3.1 percent respectively).

### Gender Variance of *Fat* Images

Research question 3 allowed the researchers to examine the *fat* images by gender. Table 2 shows the proportion of *fat* and *not fat* images relative to gender. Gender counts revealed 34 percent *fat* female images and 33 percent *fat* male images, suggesting that there is similar exposure of female and male *fat* images. Keep in mind that the number of gender occurrences in books will not equal 71 because some of the books do not contain human characters. Surprisingly, there was comparatively the same number of books with one or more female *fat* images as there were with male *fat* images.

### The Connection Between Body Size and Character Role

Finally, to answer research question 4, the researchers examined the relationship between character role and body size. Table 5 displays the frequency data related to roles that characters play in the Caldecott winners examined. (These role categories and how codes were collapsed are described in Table 1). These data reveal that crowd scenes contain the strongest message of one acceptable body size.

Table 5: Role Analysis

<b>Role Category</b>	<b><i>Not Fat</i> Character Only</b>	<b><i>Fat</i> Character Only</b>	<b>Both <i>Fat</i> and <i>Not</i> <i>Fat</i> Characters</b>
Royalty	7	1	1
Military	3	0	1
Professional	14	3	5
Police	3	5	2
Crowds	25	1	8
Other	10	3	0

A crowd scene existed in 34 of the books analyzed. Twenty-five of these 34 books (68%) with crowd scenes contain only *not fat* body images. Professional roles also reveal a high frequency of *not fat* body images. Of the twenty-two books that included a professional role, only eight of them illustrate the character with a *fat* body image. Lastly, the category of policeman was separated from the larger professional role category because of the prevalence of *fat* images for this role. Although there were only 10 books containing a police officer, seven of the books show the officer with a *fat* body.

## Discussion

The findings of this study suggest that young readers are not exposed to images of *fat* at the same or similar frequency to images of *not fat*. Although gender connections to particular body types may have been hypothesized at the onset of this study, the opposite became obviously clear. Through this content analysis the researchers found no significant link between gender and body image depictions but did find a noticeable and significant lack of instances of *fat* body illustrations when compared to the instances of *not fat* character images.

If a single exposure to a Barbie-like body image, such as in the Dittmer, Halliwell, and Ive (2006) study impacts body dissatisfaction, what kind of impact will repeated exposure in Caldecott books have? In other words, how does recurrent Barbie-like body images further cement the anti-obesity messages predominate in the media? As the findings in this study demonstrate, whether looking at main characters, supporting characters, or even crowd scenes full of people as well as looking at roles such as parents, heroes, leaders, bullies, and those needing assistance, larger body image is consistently not found. This is even more powerful for the young child due to the importance of the images in constructing meaning of the text as well as their developmentally appropriate desire to read and



re-read the same texts. A lack of instances of large body size in picture books creates a distorted view. Nodelman (1999) suggests that both adults and children learn to be “more aware of the distortions in picture book representations” (p. 79). Understanding these distortions allows the reader to examine the degree to which the illustrations misrepresent the world and to be less influenced by the ideologies (Nodelman, 1999). Likewise, Unsworth and Wheeler (2002) suggest that reviewers of pictures should consider more carefully the images of the book and their role in the narrative.

When considering this lack of exposure to a variety of body images, one might assume that young, inexperienced readers will be influenced by books they are exposed to in and out of the classroom. Birbeck and Drummond ‘s (2006) study revealed that 5 and 6 year-olds showed negative perceptions of fatness. The child participants used stories they read at school more often than other media messages when contextualizing their own stories. The researchers believe that schools should provide assistance that would allow for appropriate interpretation of “obesity” discourse that surrounds them at home and school. They suggest introducing concepts like critical literacy to young children because “critical literacy is a useful tool in questioning societal stereotypes that appear to have been absorbed by these children” (p. 432).

As teachers of young children we are trained to look at our literature choices to make sure ethnicity is not being stereotypically illustrated and look for any message in text or illustration of gender stereotyping. How often do teachers of young children systematically examine their literature choices looking for a range of body size? Our systematic examination of the Caldecott winners showed very little variance. Teachers need to consider the findings of this study as they choose texts to use in the early childhood classroom. Of course, this study only examined Caldecott winners because of their popularity in classrooms, so other texts should be examined as well. Helping teachers become more conscious of these body image messages that exist in the picture books they use in the classroom may lead to choices that maximize young children’s exposure to illustrations of various body sizes. Hopefully, texts that depict a variety of body images which better represent the world will become more readily available. Just as teachers strive to provide young children with literature that non-stereotypically and equally depict characters of different races and that avoid gender-role bias and ageism, teachers also need to strive to pick literature which avoids the message through illustration of only one acceptable body type.

Like Beck (2005), we encourage the questioning of why some constructions of knowledge are legitimated over others. In the spirit of critical literacy, we set out to determine if the popular social construction of body size was legitimized in Caldecott winners. Marginalizing one body type in favor of another creates a social inequity that expands into the economic and political realms. Our goal is to create a critical awareness of this marginalization and encourage individuals to challenge the status quo in all children's literature as it relates to body image.



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