

1994

Stereotypes of the Native American Found in Young Adult Literature

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Abstract

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**Stereotypes of the
Native American found in Young Adult Literature**

A Graduate Research Paper
Submitted to the
Division of Library Science
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

by

Kim D. Zelhart

June 19, 1994

This Research Paper by : Kim Zelhart

Titled: Stereotypes of the Native American found in Young Adult
Literature

has been approved as meeting the research paper requirement for the
Degree of Master of Arts.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

A stereotype promotes false images of intelligence, talents and moral standards and also affects the self-esteem of those being stereotyped. There are stereotypes about religion, sex, age and race. Many people feel that education is the key to developing critical understanding of stereotyping. Multicultural education works towards promoting an appreciation of diversity so that students become aware of different cultures and their contributions and alert to stereotypes. Textbooks and curricula are being examined and rewritten to ensure information is stereotype free. Even universities are taking steps toward ending cultural references that might be prejudicial. For example, in 1994 the University of Iowa decided that they would no longer compete against athletic teams whose mascots are Indians (Bullard, 1994, p.4).

While educators are trying to do their part in ending stereotypes, the popular media continues to promote stereotypes. Students are given the wrong images in television and music. One example of this can be seen in the recent Tim McGraw song, "Indian Outlaw."

"You can find me in my wigwam
I'll be beatin' on my tom tom

Pull out the pipe and smoke you some
Hey, and pass it around" (Leiby, 1994, p.1).

This excerpt is just an example of the lyrics in the song. "Indian Outlaw" is filled with stereotypical images and yet has climbed the charts in popularity. With continued popular promotion of such stereotypes it is important that students receive a non-biased view of Native Americans in educational materials, including books available in the school library.

Problem Statement

It is important that minority students see an accurate picture of themselves in literature. Roberta Long, a children's literature professor, claims, "if black children or Native Americans or Asians don't see themselves in books they won't see themselves as important people. And we will be sending that message to white children, too" (Jones, p.64). In the Monticello Schools, a rural/small-town district located in east central Iowa, students do not have direct contact with Native Americans; there are no Native American students. It is vital, however, that all students receive an accurate picture of Native Americans and their culture. It is important, therefore, that the information they receive avoid stereotypes. The researcher, the media specialist in the Monticello Jr./Sr. High School, was aware of state mandates for

Multicultural/Non-Sexist curriculum infusion, and suspected the Jr./Sr. High School media collection was inadequate and inaccurate in its representation of Native Americans. One project, in particular, brought the inadequacies and inaccuracies to the attention of the media specialist. The project was "The River's Project" which involved all sophomore students. The students were to spend the day in a hands-on learning environment learning about rivers. The staff wanted to bring in Native Americans as guest speakers to speak about how the river was an important part of the Native American culture. The media specialist wanted to give the students materials about Native Americans that would better prepare them for the speakers. In doing so the researcher came to the realization that the Monticello Jr./Sr. High School collection would not be of much assistance in the project. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the Monticello Jr./Sr. High School (grades 7-12) library young adult fiction collection. How are Native Americans portrayed in young adult literature? This is a question that concerns both teachers and librarians.

Hypothesis

It is the hypothesis of this paper that the majority of the fiction books about Native Americans in the Monticello Jr./Sr. High School will have three or more identifiable occurrences of

stereotyping.

Definitions

Native Americans- "there is no one definition of an Indian. Some full-blooded Indians do not consider Indians with one-quarter Indian heritage to be Indian, while other people with very little Indian blood consider themselves Indian. Most tribal groups call a person with at least one-fourth tribal heritage a member, but some tribes insist on one-half tribal blood and others list members with 1/128 Indian heritage. The Census Bureau lists as Indian those people who say they are. The Bureau of Indian Affairs, the main federal agency that works with Indian people, recognizes as Indian those people who live on or near a reservation, are members of a tribe the government calls a tribe, and have at least one-fourth Indian blood. One Indian law center has recorded fifty-two definitions of Indians used in law" (Hirschfelder, 1986, p.2).

This paper used the definition of the Census Bureau. Any book identifying a character as an Indian was acceptable for the study.

Young adult literature- defined as books that can be read from pre-teen through the teenage years.

Stereotype- is an oversimplified, preconceived and generalized belief about members of a group, usually carrying derogatory implications.

Limitations of the Study

The study was limited to the fiction books found in the Monticello Jr./Sr. High School collection. Books for younger children, non-book informational materials, and non-fiction books were not included.

Assumptions

Indians are stereotyped in information sources as are other minority groups. It is assumed that the researcher is able to recognize and record occurrences of stereotyping.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Stereotypes of Native Americans have been present for many years. Robert Berkhofer (1979) suggests that such stereotyping began in the Puritan journals. The Puritans came to America to begin a "pure" life. When the Indians would not conform to the Puritan religion, they were seen as "Satan's helpers" (p.81). The Native American's image did not improve in later years. Because they stood in the way of progress and Manifest Destiny, the image of the "savage" was born (Bataille and Silet, 1980, p.xx). The American Indian's popularity as fictional character increased between the War of 1812 and the Civil War, the height of the Romantic Era. It was the Romantic Era that reinforced and popularized the false portrayal of the Indians. The "noble savage" became the ideal subject for Romantic writers (Berkhofer, 1979, p.86). Dime store novels of the Civil War era also reinforced the stereotypes. The warring Indian became the center of the novels (Hirschfelder, 1982, p.25).

Raymond Stedman in his 1982 study points out several items to consider when identifying stereotypes. The first is, is the language demeaning? Does the book use words like redskin, half-breed, squaw instead of Indian, child or woman? Use of such words

triggers "negative and derogatory images" (Slapin, 1987, p.88).

These generalizations support and sustain the stereotypical images of the Native American. The second is, do the Indians use broken language when speaking? For example, "we want'em scalp you." Thirdly, are they wearing feathered bonnets? These were not worn at all times (p.240). The fourth item is, are they portrayed as drunks to bring comedy relief to the story? Fifth, are they seen as no longer existing? Finally, are they noble or savage when they are portrayed? Are they portrayed as being kind (p.245)?

What is the stereotypical image of the Native American?

There have been several studies about stereotypical images of Native Americans. Bataille and Silet's (1980) study of film portrayals found some depicted Native Americans as having no redeeming moral values. In films, most Native Americans are male, few females are portrayed. They are savage, bloodthirsty, anti-social, drunkards, lazy and heathens, and belong to no tribe in particular (p.xxiii). Hirschfelder (1986) in her book, Happily May I Walk, points out that no two Indian tribes are alike. She states that to compare Indian tribes as being alike is similar to claiming that America was discovered by Europeans not the English, French, and Spanish (p.3).

Laura Fisher (1974) in her study of the portrayal of Native

Americans in children's books found other stereotypes. She saw the Indians portrayed as a solemn group with no sense of humor.

Massacres of whites were portrayed as common, as was the taking of many white captives. Another common portrayal was that Indians at one time in their life would have been a captive of another tribe or of the white man. If the Indians did escape, they were portrayed in one of two ways. They either remained loyal to their "white blood brother," or they were portrayed as bringing guns and the white man's power to the Native American people. Yet another stereotype Fisher found was the characteristic that all Indians became chiefs (p.185).

A later study of children's books found Native Americans portrayed as warlike and hostile. They were never viewed as defending land that was theirs, but as bloodthirsty savages. The settlers were always portrayed as innocent (Hirschfelder, 1982, p.8). The boys were dressed in buckskins, feathers and headbands (p.35). This image is incorrect. Indians wore their headbands for religious ceremonies only; they were not part of the daily wear. Indians in films and books belonged to no particular tribe, used bows and arrows exclusively, and often did not have names. Another stereotype that is incorrect deals with the practice of scalping. Indians did not scalp people to receive honor within the tribe. Never

is it mentioned that non-Indians scalped people also. In fact white people went as far as offering rewards for Indian scalps (p.41). These images give the impression that Indians are not human beings (p.35). Native Americans are portrayed "either as noble superhumans, or as depraved barbarous subhumans. There is no opportunity for them to behave like mere human beings" (Slapin, 1987, p.88).

Another inaccuracy is how Native American religion is portrayed in young adult books. Characters are often wearing headbands as part of daily life. This portrayal is inaccurate because headbands were only worn as part of a religious ceremony. Religion is part of the Native American's everyday life. It is based on nature and the supernatural. Given these beliefs, everything associated with their way of life is sacred to the Native Americans (Hirschfelder, 1986, p.42). Most Native American ceremonies are private and to write about them or the objects involved in the ceremonies "would be the equivalent, to a Christian, of blasphemy" (Slapin, 1987, p.124).

One study discovered that even recent picture books for young children contain stereotypes. N. C. Wyeth's Pilgrims by Robert D. San Souci, written in 1991 portrays Indians as half dressed and shooting arrows. Elaine Raphael and Don Bolognese's 1991 book,

Story of the First Thanksgiving, also has Indians using bows and arrows. The women are carrying bags that would normally be used as a sacred item, not as a shoulder bag. Another stereotypical book is the 1992 book Friendship's First Thanksgiving by William Accorsi. Told from a dog's point of view the reader sees the Indians still half dressed and wearing feathers that normally would not be worn.

Salcott, the Indian Boy by Melinda Eldridge won the 1989 Raintree Publish-a-Book contest but it too contains misinformation. Indian names are wrongly used and animal symbols are misinterpreted. William Accorsi's 1992 book, My Name is Pocahontas, portrays white men as "pale face" and Indians as "braves" (MacCann,1993, p.32).

Hirschfelder (1982) conducted a survey of children in grades kindergarten to fifth grade in order to see how media stereotypes affected children's views about Native Americans. One result of the study was that they tend to view Indians as mean and as killers. They tend to see Indians as living only in the past. Indians, in their minds, wear skin clothes and feathers. The fathers hunt as their main occupation. In fact, most children surveyed could not imagine a Native American father ever working at a desk job or in a factory. The Native American children do not go to school but instead learn to hunt and shoot. The children viewed the Indians as living someplace

else, not in their hometowns. Their houses would be tents or caves (p.8). Hirschfelder sums it up as "most children view Indian people as far removed from their own way of life" (p.7).

When Christopher Columbus first encountered the Arawak and Taino people he described them as gentle and hospitable. Thinking he had landed in India he named these new people Indians. Their gentleness and hospitality did not stop Columbus from taking many of the "Indians" back in chains to Spain. "Columbus wasn't nearly the first to land here, only one of the first to exploit the land and its people" (Slapin, 1987, p.9). The American Indian became the first minority to be victimized by stereotypes. While stereotypical generalities about other minorities have evolved and changed, the Native American's have stayed the same; as if the Indians are stuck in the time period between 1800 and 1880 (Bataille, 1980, p.22). Today's children still view Native Americans in the traditional sense. When asked to describe "Indians", non-Native children see historical figures from that early era, never real people living in the present like themselves (Hirschfelder, 1982, p.8). "Native Americans are no more, now, thought of as human beings, on the same level as members of white society, than at any other time in the last 500 years" (Slapin, 1987, p.13).

It is important that materials reaching students be bias free.

"Children's literature reflects the public consciousness" (Fisher, 1974, p.185). Literature can convey and reinforce stereotypes (p.189). Children's books are part of society's general culture. They reflect our society and reinforce racism (Slapin, 1987, p.2).

One of the related problems with books about Native Americans is that the authors are non-Indian writers. While other minorities do not have enough books about them Native American books are numerous. Unfortunately, they are also poorly written portrayals of the Native Americans (Hirschfelder, 1982, p.34). "Few Native writers and artists are published by mainstream presses, and few children have even a passing knowledge of the real histories and cultures of Native people" (Slapin, 1987, p.2). Hirschfelder states that "non-Indian writers have created an image of American Indians that is almost sheer fantasy. It is an image that is not authentic and one that has little value except that of sustaining the illusion that original inhabitants deserved to lose their land because they were so barbaric and uncivilized" (p.39). Doris Seale (1987) shows that the only groups of Americans whose history was written solely by non-members is the Indians (p.12). To help alleviate this problem young Native American authors are being encouraged to break stereotypical images by writing from their own real experiences. One such attempt at this is the book Rising Voices: Writings of

Young Native Americans (Hirschfelder and Singer, 1992).

Selection of culturally-sensitive material is necessary to ensure a greater appreciation and respect for different cultures both now and in the past (Fisher, 1974, p.189). "People who work with children do believe that what kids read, or have read to them, does affect them" (Slapin, 1987, p.11). Schools are attempting to deal with stereotypes through implementation of multicultural curricula. The change in children's books has been smoother than the change in curriculum, because publishers and consumers are reacting to a perceived need (Jones, 1991, p.64). Gone are the quaint customs books (p.65). Instead they are replaced by books that show respect for individuals and culture. These books also show the culture conflict many Native Americans face (Fisher, 1974, p.185). Today's Indian conflicts are inner, a clash between Indian culture and American culture. The resolution in these books is to see the Indian culture as rich in heritage. One must be careful to avoid stereotypes because it strips Indian children of their self esteem. And it also allows others to accept those stereotypes as normal because that's what they've been taught (MacCann, 1993, p.33). "Literature is generally considered an appropriate vehicle in ethnic programs to build respect for individuals across cultures by sharpening sensitivity for individuals of other groups through intimate

acquaintance with them" (Fisher, 1974, p.187).

Why worry about selection of books and the consequences if we do not chose literature wisely? Doris Seale (1987) stated it best by saying "the child who is taught to feel hate or contempt for those who seem different from herself, will be less than a whole human being because of it" (p.16).

Chapter 3

Methodology

Twenty-eight young adult fiction books in the Monticello Jr./Sr. High School library collection were identified as literature about the Native American. The researcher analyzed the Monticello catalog for the standard headings found in the 13th edition of the Sears List of Subject Headings; Indians-Fiction, Indians of North America-Fiction, Native Americans-Fiction, and names of specific tribes. Copyrights ranged from 1947 to 1993. The Monticello Jr./Sr. High School has in its fiction collection a total of 2680 books. Of these 2680, only 28 had Native Americans as main or secondary characters. See Appendix A for the list of books read.

A checklist (see Appendix B) was used to determine the presence of stereotypes in the books. The stereotype characteristics used in the checklist were adapted from the 1989 book Anti-Bias Curriculum Tools for Empowering Young Children by Louise Derman-Sparks. This book was used because of its depth in covering all stereotypes. A sample book The Wilderness Way (Merritt Parmelle Allen, 1954) was read to establish the validity of the form. This book contained almost all of the stereotypical images of Native Americans but provided no additional images

missing from the original form.

Each of the twenty-eight titles found in the Monticello Jr./Sr. High School collection was read and data recorded on the checklist. A separate checklist was necessary for each title.

Chapter 4

Data Analysis

Twenty-eight fiction titles with Native Americans as primary or secondary characters were identified and read. Only one book was totally free of stereotypes. Only one author was a Native American, Jamake Highwater. Even his book, The Ceremony of Innocence, contained four occurrences of stereotypes.

One of the most common characteristics displayed was of Native Americans as having poor economic status. Of the twenty-eight books read, twenty-two of them had the economic status of the character as poor. Not one book had a middle class or wealthy Native American character. For example, in both The Brave (1991) and The Chief (1993) the main character, Sonny Bear, lives in a junkyard on the reservation. The reservation has no economic way to support itself unless it resorts to opening a casino.

A common stereotype found was that of anti-social behavior. For instance in Shadow Brothers (1990) Henry Yazzie does not belong to the "in crowd" and when he finds himself faced with problems he pushes his foster family away. Hunting as the occupation of an entire tribe and males portrayed only as hunters and trackers were

the next common stereotypes. Primrose Way (1992) had both stereotypes for the Qunnequawese tribe. The males of the tribe did nothing but hunt and track, and the survival of the tribe depended solely on hunting.

The most prominent stereotype was the wearing of headbands. As stated earlier in the literature review, headbands were worn only for special ceremonies. The Primrose Way, set in Colonial America, had characters who also wore their headbands at inappropriate times. They wore them all day, every day. Even contemporary characters such as Sonny Bear in The Brave, set in the late 1980's, wore his headband while traveling on the bus to New York City.

The stereotypes found least in the study were those of Native American characters portrayed as wise old chiefs, heavysset squaws, or drunks. The wise old chief character was portrayed in Talking God (1990) as helping to solve a murder-mystery case. The heavysset squaw was portrayed in Eagle Fur (1978). The squaw was the mother of the "Indian princess." The drunk was portrayed also in Eagle Fur (1978). In this book the entire Cree tribe worked and traded for whiskey as their sole means of economic survival.

The hypothesis for this study was "that the majority of the fiction books about Native Americans in the Monticello Jr./Sr. High School will have three or more identifiable incidents of

stereotyping." Of the twenty-eight books, twenty-four displayed three or more stereotypes of Native Americans. Data documenting the inclusion of stereotypes in all titles are displayed in Table 1.

The hypothesis is accepted.

	savage	drunk	hunter/ tracker	child of nature	wise old chief	anti- social	heavy squaw	indian princess	hunter	warrior	crafts- people	unem- ployed	poor	Totals
Bearstone (C)						X							X	2
The Brave (C)						X					X		X	3
Canyons (C)			X						X	X			X	4
Ceremony of Innocence						X		X	X				X	4
The Chief (C)						X					X		X	3
Eagle Fur	X	X	X				X	X	X	X			X	8
A Far Trumpet	X		X						X	X		X		5
Gamebuster (C)													X	1
A Girl Named Wendy (C)						X		X					X	3
Hatter Fox (C)						X		X				X	X	4
In the Hands of the Senecas	X		X				X		X	X	X		X	7
Killdeer Mountain (C)	X		X			X			X	X			X	6
The Light in the Forest	X		X			X			X	X			X	6
Maheo's Children	X	X	X	X		X			X	X			X	8
Medicine River (C)														0
The Place of Devils			X			X			X	X				4
Primrose Way	X		X					X	X	X				5
Quiver River (C)			X	X		X			X	X			X	6
The Red Sabbath	X		X						X	X			X	5
Revolutions of the Heart (C)						X						X	X	3
Secret Keeper (C)				X		X							X	3
Shadow Brothers (C)						X								1
Sign of the Beaver			X	X		X			X				X	5
Streams to the River								X			X		X	3
Summer of the Drums						X				X			X	3
Talking God (C)			X		X				X					3
Wolf Brother			X			X					X		X	4
Zia						X					X		X	3
Totals	8	2	14	4	1	18	2	6	14	12	6	3	22	112

NUMBER OF STEREOTYPE OCCURRENCES

TABLE 1

Chapter 5

Conclusions, Recommendations, Summary

Of the twenty-eight books read only four had fewer than three identifiable stereotypes. Six of the books had between six and eight identifiable stereotypes. The remaining eighteen books had from four to six stereotypes. A total of one hundred-twelve stereotypical occurrences were found in this group of books from the Monticello Jr./Sr. High School young adult fiction collection. Those books with contemporary settings were found to have four or fewer occurrences of stereotyping. One book, Quiver River (1991), has six occurrences of stereotypes. The books with historical settings have a wide range of stereotype occurrences. The books with contemporary settings are designated on Table 1 with a (c) after the title. The early copyright books mostly portrayed the Native Americans in the historical settings. For example, In the Hands of the Senecas (1947), takes place in the 1700's when America was first being settled. These Native Americans were portrayed as savages that scalped, killed and took hostages. The difference is that early copyrighted books portrayed the Native American as part of a tribe not as an individual person. Later copyrighted books portrayed the Native American as an individual. In Shadow Brothers (1990),

Yazzie is the main character and is never mentioned as being part of a tribe.

Where are students receiving this misinformation? And what is the solution to the problem? Children today receive inaccurate information from materials long considered classic books. For example, Little House on the Prairie describes the following scene. "The naked wild men stood by the fireplace. . . Laura smelled a horrible bad smell . . . Their faces were bold and fierce" (Slapin, 1987, p.11). To help students unlearn Indian stereotypes books such as Hirschfelder's Happily May I Walk should be included in the collection and also used as a reference source for authors writing fictional accounts for young adults.

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher will reconsider those titles with six or more stereotypical occurrences and those titles that portray the Native Americans as "savage" for inclusion in the young adult fiction collection at the Monticello Jr./Sr. High School.

Future Native American fiction books need be evaluated by the librarian carefully. Fiction books written by Native Americans should be a high priority. The checklist's stereotype characteristics should be kept in mind when selecting books for future purchases. It is difficult to find books, such as Medicine River, without any

stereotyping, but the Native American as a savage beast, killing and scalping white people should be avoided at all costs. Reliable evaluation sources should be consulted. Those one might wish to consult are Through Indian Eyes: the Native Experience in Books for Children (Slapin, 1987) and Naomi Caldwell-Wood's bibliography, "I" is Not for Indian: the Portrayal of Native Americans in Books for Young People. The Caldwell-Wood source is a useful tool in that it gives not only good books but also books to avoid. The stereotype checklist must be kept in mind even if the book is authored by a Native American. Having a Native American author does not guarantee that the portrayals are correct.

Even though gender was not included as an aspect of this study, books with Native American females as main characters should be considered for purchase. These books are difficult to find and there are few good Native American female characters who do not "fall in love with the white man."

Recommendations

The researcher would recommend that if this study is replicated, that the checklist be modified. Parental status should not be included and neither should the economic status of rich and middle class. These were not true stereotypes. It would also be

interesting to include non-fiction Native American materials. This would be useful because most students get their research information from non-fiction books. Therefore it is essential that non-fiction books and other non-print media also be void of stereotyping.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the Monticello Jr./Sr. High School Native American young adult fiction collection for stereotypes. A stereotype checklist based on Anti-Bias Curriculum Tools for Empowering Young Children was used to record the occurrences of stereotypes. The most common stereotypes found in this group were anti-social and the male stereotyped as a hunter or tracker. The stereotype found least in this group of books was the portrayal of males as a wise old chief. Other stereotypes not widely represented in this groups of books were the Native Americans as a drunk or the female as a heavysset squaw. It was believed that the majority of the twenty-eight Native American fiction books in the Monticello collection would display three or more stereotypes. This hypothesis was accepted because twenty-four of the twenty-eight books identified and read did display three or more identifiable stereotypes.

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APPENDIX A

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Stereotypes of Native Americans

Males

- | | | |
|--------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Savage, bloodthirsty "native" | <input type="checkbox"/> Antisocial |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Stoic, loyal follower | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Drunken, mean thief | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Drunken comic | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Hunter, tracker | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Child of nature | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Wise old chief | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Evil medicine man | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Brave boy, endowed with special "Indian" qualities | |

Females

- | | | |
|--------------------------|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Heavysset, workhorse "squaw" | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | "Indian princess" | |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> European features | |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> In love with white man | |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Willing to sacrifice her life for love | |

Occupational Stereotypes

- | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------|--------------------------|--------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Hunters | <input type="checkbox"/> | Cattles thieves |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Warriors | <input type="checkbox"/> | Unemployed loafers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Craftspeople | | |

Economic Status

- | | |
|--------------------------|--------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Poor |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Middle Class |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Rich |

Parental Status

- | | |
|--------------------------|---------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Single |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Married |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Widowed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Other |