BOOKS FOR BOYS AND GIRLS TODAY: AN ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF NON-SEXIST BOOKS FOR INFANTS, TODDLERS AND PRESCHOOLERS

First Edition

Parents and early childhood educators know the importance of books in children's lives. Books provide a point of entry to the world, giving children new places to explore and new people to meet. When sharing books with children, parents and childcare providers can bring life to the book, explaining words and pictures as they share in the discovery of the world.

Because of the important role books play in providing windows to the world, we believe books for young children should provide affirming messages about individuality, diversity and equality. Children's books should provide appealing, diverse, positive role models for children. Unfortunately, too many children's books do not achieve these standards. For example, although female characters in children's books have increased in *number*, too few women and girls are featured in realistic roles as dynamic, inquisitive individuals. Too often, male characters are portrayed as tough or aggressive without adequate attention being paid to boys and men who are emotionally expressive and compassionate. Parents and families are often portrayed as two-parent families with business-suited dads and at-home moms, without portrayal of the range of family roles that adults fill today.

With these stereotypical depictions in mind, we set out to identify *non-sexist* children's books -- books that challenge some of the long-held stereotypes of boys, girls and

parents that live on in children's literature. Focusing specifically on books for our youngest readers, we looked for books featuring active, inquisitive girls, caring and expressive boys, dynamic women and nurturing men. We looked for books that reflect the dimensions of the diverse world we *really* live in as shown not only through portrayal of different cultures and lifestyles but also through the choices characters make, their activities, their relationships and their emotions.

The Selection Process

We visited libraries, and scoured children's book stores (and our own bookshelves) in search of non-sexist children's literature. We looked for books that:

- promote caring, nuturing, expressive boys and men
- promote adventurous, curious, active girls and women
- avoid sex-typing of toys, emotions, clothing, behavior of children
- avoid sex-typing of clothes, jobs, parenting roles of adults
- are suitable for a child between 0 and 5 years of age

We needed the consensus of our entire group -- nine of us -- to decide if a book met our criteria and would appear on the list. We had many thoughtful debates. We did not always agree. As we deliberated over illustrations, text and plot we were continually challenged to revisit our criterion and re-think our ideas.

How to Use This List

This book list provides ideas for diversifying young children's experiences through books. We do not feel that the books we recommend are the only books of merit for children today. Our hope is to provide breadth to children's reading experiences, without

(C)Spillane,C; Crowley, M.