"It's Elementary": What *Nancy Drew* Reveals About Gender Construction

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Abstract

This article examines gender portrayal in children's detective fiction and its implications for gender construction among children. Specifically, the author draws from excerpts from *The Hardy Boys* and *Nancy Drew Mystery Stories*, as well as references from Walt Disney films, to analyze how gender portrayal and expectations of characters are influenced by the genre and media in which they are presented. The article begins with a review of research on the role that early literature plays in shaping young children's social understanding. It then considers the conventional depiction of women in detective fiction to establish the stereotypes that are broken by Nancy Drew's emergence in the genre. It proceeds into an analysis of the portrayal of Nancy Drew and a critical comparison with the portrayal of several Disney princesses. Then, the article extends into an inspection of the audience and popular response to Nancy Drew, providing key insight to the greater social impact of women in the detective genre. Finally, the author remarks on what studying gender typification and depiction among children's media can reveal about current discussions on femininity in the workplace, politics, athletics, and broader society.

Introduction

In 1927, American author Edward Stratemeyer created perhaps two of the most iconic young detectives of the century - Frank and Joe Hardy. Published by the Stratemeyer Syndicate and written by a group of ghostwriters collectively known under the pseudonym Franklin W. Dixon, *The Hardy Boys* quickly became a household name among children and teenagers who found themselves clinging to every clue found, discovery made, and mystery solved by the brothers. More than a just popular series, *The Hardy Boys* had important effects on its audience. Along with other books in the detective fiction genre, *The Hardy Boys* is a major influencer of conceptions of gender, the mechanisms of which we can see from the very first pages of the series. Below are the opening passages from the first volume in the series, *The Tower Treasure (1927)*:

> "After the help we gave dad on that forgery case I guess he'll begin to think we could be detectives when we grow up."
> "Why shouldn't we? Isn't he one of the most famous detectives in the country? And aren't we his sons? If the profession was good enough for him to follow it should be good enough for us."
> Two bright-eyed boys on motorcycles were speeding along a shore road in the sunshine of a morning in spring. It was Saturday and they were enjoying a holiday from the Bayport high school. The day was ideal for a motorcycle trip and the lads were combining business with pleasure by going on an errand to a near-by village for their father.
> The older of the two boys was a tall, dark youth, about sixteen years of age. His name was Frank Hardy. The other boy, his companion on the motorcycle trip, was his brother Joe, a year younger (Dixon 1-2).

Three years later in 1930, Nancy Drew made her first appearance as the female counterpart to *The Hardy Boys*. A byproduct of the immense popularity achieved by the detective duo brothers, Nancy Drew launched into an equally, if not more, successful franchise. The first book in the *Nancy Drew Mystery Stories* series, *The Secret of the Old Clock (1930)*, opens with the following paragraphs:

> "It would be a shame if all that money went to the Tophams! They will fly higher than ever!"
> Nancy Drew, a pretty girl of sixteen, leaned over the library table and addressed her father who sat reading a newspaper by the study lamp.
> "I beg your pardon, Nancy. What were you saying about the Tophams?"
> Carson Drew, a noted criminal and mystery-case lawyer, known far and wide for his work as a former district attorney, looked up from his evening paper and smiled indulgently upon his only daughter. Now, as he gave her his respectful attention, he was not particularly concerned with the Richard Topham family but rather with the rich glow of the lamp upon Nancy's curly golden bob. Not at all the sort of head which one expected to indulge in serious thoughts, he told himself (Keene 1-2).

Now, it is easy to point out the similarities in the two expositions. In both books, the main characters are introduced through dialogue. In both, the protagonists' fathers are renowned figures in detective-related work. Both openings point out the similar ages of their characters (Frank and

Nancy are both 16, while Joe is 15). We might even note that both introductions include brief descriptions of the physical traits of their lead characters. In these ways, it appears that the Hardy Boys and Nancy Drew have quite a bit in common. A closer inspection of the interactions in these opening pages, however, reveals striking differences in the portrayal of the heroes and heroines. While the initial impression that readers have of the Hardy brothers is a sense of adventure and movement as they speed along in their motorcycles, Nancy's introduction is very different. She, instead, sits at a library table, devoid of the action that surrounds the Hardy Boys. A detail as minute as this might feel insignificant when we first glance over the stories as it seems simply a matter of setting. But consider another difference in the depiction of the main characters in their respective settings - while the brothers engage in a riveting, reciprocated conversation, Nancy struggles to capture the attention of the only other character present, her father. In fact, her father asks Nancy to repeat herself, presumably because whatever's in the newspaper is much more exciting than what she has to say. Even after he gives his daughter his full attention, he still disregards her insights about the Topham family. What happens next in this opening scene is perhaps the most revelatory to the discussion at hand. We are given a glimpse into Nancy's father's thoughts, which are strangely concerned with his daughter's head. In particular, he is preoccupied with Nancy's "curly golden bob," which one wouldn't expect "to indulge in serious thoughts" (2). Carson Drew's peculiar observations of his daughter highlight a fundamental disparity among the representations of the detectives in *Nancy Drew* and *The Hardy Boys*. The emphasis placed on Nancy's hair and seemingly inconscient mind in the very first sentences of *Nancy Drew* draws focus to her physical appearance and simultaneously demonstrates expectations of her intelligence.

Just the opening sections of *Nancy Drew* and *The Hardy Boys* contain plenty of subtle yet important distinctions in the portrayal of the iconic detectives that shaped the lives of children reading about those detectives in the twentieth century and, frankly, still shape the lives of hundreds of thousands of children today. For this reason, Nancy Drew is an unexpectedly relevant vector for the analysis of gender socialization among children. To examine what Nancy Drew and, more broadly, children's detective fiction might reveal about gender construction, it is important to first establish the role that early literature plays in shaping young children's social understanding. Analyzing how Nancy Drew disrupts conventional depictions of women in detective fiction then allows us to see how she diverges from other non-stereotypic girl characters with similar audiences, such as princesses in Walt Disney films. This cross-genre analysis reveals a key insight to our ideas of gender – that the way we judge characters is inherently shaped by the expectations for the genre they're occurring. Dissecting the public's reaction to Nancy Drew's overturning of the prototype of the detective ultimately extrapolates the

implications of strong female figures in the workplace, politics, and beyond. The culmination of this study of gender construction through the frame of children's detective fiction will hopefully lead to pertinent insights about gender ideology in current society.

Early Literature and Gender Construction

"My mother told me to be a lady. And for her, that meant be your own person, be independent." - Ruth Bader Ginsburg (Sive and Roosevelt)

What about Nancy Drew prompted current and former Supreme Court Associate Justices Sonia Sotomayor, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, and Sandra Day O'Connor (Murphy), former Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, former First Lady Laura Bush, and TV personality Oprah Winfrey, among others, to cite her as a critical influence during their childhood years (Parker)? To understand the extent of Nancy Drew's contribution to these prominent figures' lives, we must first take a look at the psychological effects that children's literature has on social development. Doing so will allow us to more clearly orient ourselves to the immense impact of Nancy Drew.

Mary Trepanier-Street and Jane Romatowski, professors of education at the University of Michigan-Dearborn, studied how literature during the early childhood years affects children's conceptions of gender by expanding on two existing theories. One theory was Gender Schema Theory, proposed in 1981 by Sandra Bem, a researcher in the Department of Psychology at Cornell University. Bem claimed it was a cognitive theory to explain how gender-based schematic processing leads to sex-typing in society (Bem). Her proposal asserts that children learn to "process information in terms of an evolving gender schema," or a "cognitive network of associations that organizes and guides an individual's perceptions" (Bem). In other words, this theory frames a child's conception of gender as an ever-changing and selective processing of stimuli. Then, in 1992, Albert Bandura at Stanford University contributed to the discussion of gender construction by proposing the Social Cognitive Theory, which states that individuals acquire knowledge at least in part due to pure observation of social interactions and experiences (Bandura).

With these theories in mind, Trepanier-Street and Romatowski conducted an inventory on 74 children ranging from preschoolers to first-graders. They asked each child individually whether a set of occupational roles were for men, women, or both. Then, over a two-month period, six selected children's stories featuring non-stereotypic gender roles and activities were read to the group of children by trained teachers. The same questions regarding occupational roles were then asked. The results of this study indicated that "children during the early childhood years have a gender-stereotypic view about the occupational roles assigned to males

and females," but that gender attitudes changed after reading non-stereotypic literature (Trepanier-Street and Romatowski).

This study demonstrates the importance of a character like Nancy Drew in the development of gender attitudes among the young. In particular, it illuminates how having a single example of an independent young female detective like Nancy Drew can vastly change the landscape of gender construction, especially during children's formative years. Perhaps this is why Nancy is often quoted by influential women - for entertaining the thought that a girl could be intelligent, could single-handedly solve mysteries, and could embark on exciting adventures, all qualities traditionally attributed to boyhood. When we investigate the historical context of Nancy Drew, we can see that the timing of her popularity among a "critical mass of eight- to twelve-year-old girls" is not unfounded (Inness 160). According to Deborah Siegel, Nancy Drew "arrived on the heels of the era that witnessed the rise of the...New Woman - the social, economic, and political advancement of single, highly educated, economically autonomous bourgeois women who fought for professional visibility, eschewed marriage, espoused economic and social reform, and wielded real political power" (Inness 160). To young readers, Nancy Drew's arrival was a slightly glossier version of the New Woman. She existed "during a time when competing codes of feminine conduct raised questions about standards of behavior" and brought together the clashing ideas about American womanhood. It was unusual at the time to see a character which could embody physicality, beauty, and intelligence all at once. Siegel writes that "Nancy bears little resemblance to the sensational heroines of crime stories created by nineteenth-century women writers" because instead of relying on sensationalism, she relies on logic and deduction (Inness 173). This brings up a fundamental detail of Nancy's allure: not only is it important to have strong female characters to stand as role models for young girls, it is equally as important to have strong female characters to counter their own mythical notions. Adopting this perspective allows us to consider what really made Nancy Drew a guiding beacon of femininity - her ability to transcend existing stereotypes.

The Mystery of Disney

"You can't be what you can't see." - Marian Wright Edelman (Maclellan)

If the original Nancy Drew was the trailblazer of investigation for girls from the 1930s to the 1980s, how have changes in gender construction throughout the century affected the modern take on strong female role models? One answer to this question lies in Disney films due to the similar target audiences of these films and of the *Nancy Drew* series. Like early literature, early media has notable effects on the socialization of their audiences. In a 1980 study about television viewing and children's learning of sex-role stereotypes, which was one of the first published

studies on the topic, researchers Paul McGhee and Terry Frueh used the Sex Stereotype Measure developed in 1975 to assess the extent to which television affects children's perceptions of stereotypical characteristics. Their findings reaffirmed the notion that observational learning through mediums like television has dramatic effects on "children's acquisition of stereotypic perceptions of behavior and psychological characteristics associated with males and females" (McGhee and Frueh). Thus, it is appropriate to consider the consequences that advancements in technology, such as film and media, since the 1930s have had on gender portrayal for young audiences.

In 1937, Walt Disney's first feature film, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs,* was released. In this film based off of the 19th-century German fairy tale published by the Brothers Grimm, a beautiful princess named Snow White is made to flee the kingdom after her evil stepmother queen devises a plan to kill her for being the "fairest in the land." Snow White, having been spared by the huntsman who was ordered to kill her, stumbles upon a cottage owned by seven dwarfs living in the woods. They eventually work out an agreement for her to hide out in the cottage in exchange for housekeeping. After finding out that Snow White is not dead, the queen tricks her into eating a poisoned apple and falling into a coma-like spell, which can only be broken by "love's first kiss." A year later, a prince comes along, kisses her, breaks the spell, and they live happily ever after.

Though the film follows closely to its inspiration, it is interesting to note the subtle differences between the original Brothers Grimm version of the story and Disney's film version. In the German fairy tale, Snow White does not clean with the animals or sing when she finds the dwarfs' cottage. Instead, she merely eats some food from the plates and falls asleep. Another discrepancy between the two versions is that while in the film, the spell cast on Snow White is broken by a prince's kiss, in the original fairy tale, Snow White awakens due to the poisoned apple falling out of her mouth. These specific changes raise the question - why did Disney stray from the original storyline?

According to Nandini Maity's textual analysis of gender roles in Disney films, "these changes were added by Disney… to forward a sexist agenda" (Maity). In particular, we see that including the scene of Snow White performing chores such as washing dishes and cleaning the house represents societal expectations placed on women. Similarly, the plot-change which necessitated the prince's kiss in order to save Snow White represents similar gender role expectations by portraying the woman as completely dependent on a man to literally keep her alive. Not an isolated case, the wildly popular Disney adaptation of Snow White shares telling characteristics with the Disney princess films that immediately followed. Maity writes that early "Disney Corporation films such as Cinderella, Snow White, Sleeping Beauty have certain themes in common… the traits of these princesses, featured through these films are submissiveness and

servitude" (Maity). Indeed, in *Cinderella (1950)*, the protagonist is another beautiful yet restrained girl who is skilled in cooking and cleaning. And like Snow White, Cinderella depends on a prince to bring her a better life full of happiness. These early instances of the stereotypical Disney princess demonstrate that while "they possess divine beauty, these princesses only seem to be capable of suffering in silence, and it is because of this, they are finally given the ultimate reward: salvation through the handsome Prince Charming" (Maity). From these examples of Disney princesses in the 1930s to the 1950s, we can gather the qualities of the role models that girls repeatedly sought to emulate.

The good news is, Disney princess films have been on a positive trajectory to eliminate the inherent biases placed on some of its early protagonists. In a research article published on *The Washington Post*, writer Jeff Guo details the results of a linguistic study on Disney movies conducted by linguists Carmen Fought and Karen Eisenhauer. The purpose of the research was to "analyze all the dialogue from the Disney princess franchise" because "it's worth examining what the films are teaching about gender roles" (Guo). While analyses of classic Disney princess films found that 55% of the compliments that women received had to do with their appearance and 11% had to do with their accomplishments, 40% of the compliments received by Disney's 21st-century princesses were related to their skills or achievements, and a diminished 22% to their appearance (Guo). According to Fought and Eisenhauer's research, the gender landscape of the all-popular Disney princess films has drastically changed from focusing on women's traits to focusing on women's abilities.

A case study of Disney's most recent princess film, *Brave (2012)*, solidifies the findings from this research. What the *Nancy Drew* series was for the genre of detective fiction typical in the early 1900s, *Brave* is for the genre of Disney princess stories. *Brave* is the story of Merida, a Scottish princess in the Dunbroch clan who is adamant against her arranged engagement to the son of one of her father's allies. Merida's suitors must compete for her hand in marriage, and while her mother pressures her into complying to the arrangement, Merida makes it her mission to resist the patronizing tradition. In this contemporary princess film, the female protagonist is independent and strong, unlike many of her early predecessors who were reliant and weak. In fact, Brenda Chapman, the creator of Brave, "said that she specifically wanted to smash the stereotype of the Disney princess movie," and created Merida "specifically to break that mold" (Guo). Like Nancy Drew, Merida is simultaneously and uncompromisingly feminine in a patriarchal world where such a feat seems insurmountable. By placing Nancy Drew in conversation with female role models for similar audiences, we expand our comprehension of the magnitude of her accomplishments as an icon for youth.

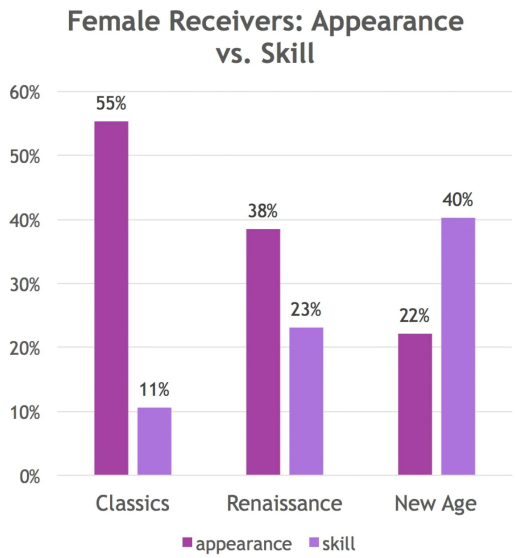

Figure 1. Carmen Fought and Karen Eisenhauer's linguistic study on Disney princess films shows the positive trend in the distribution of compliments received for a princess's appearance versus compliments received for her skill. "Classics" refers to the earliest trio of princesses – Snow White, Cinderella, and Aurora; "Renaissance" refers to princesses from the 1990s; and "New Age" refers to the most recent princess films, *The Princess and the Frog*, *Tangled, Brave,* and *Frozen* (Guo).

Rewriting Children's Detective Fiction

Contextualizing Nancy Drew by comparison with princesses can, however, also highlight the limitations that each genre places on the ability for its female protagonists to serve as a revolutionary model. To further our understanding of Nancy Drew's impact within the realm of detective fiction, we must examine what status quo she was breaking through her very existence and how she was innovating upon the conventions of the detective story as a genre. To do so, we consider the historical portrayal of women within detective fiction.

In an article published online on *The Independent*, Alexander McCall Smith, author of *The No. 1 Ladies Detective Agency,* writes about the early roots of gender stereotypes in Victorian mystery literature, noting that women were typically characterized as needing to be "protected from the harsh realities of life" and "in regular need of smelling salts" (Smith). Typical characterization such as this facilitates an attitude that women are somehow unable to fend for themselves against the dangers of the world, or that they are too weak to handle the realities of the worlds they live in. In fact, "there were many jobs that a woman simply could not be expected to do because they were viewed as unsuitable for finer female sensibilities" (Smith). It is this underlying expectation for women in the

genre that offers Nancy Drew as a character that is simultaneously familiar and foreign in the field. According to Smith, audiences are attracted to female detectives because they are "often portrayed as the outsider in the male world of policing and criminal investigation," and when we are along for the moment when "women defeat these overbearing men" and "sceptical and sexist superiors who are only too eager to detect weakness," we experience the same satisfaction that follows victory (Smith). What's unique about Nancy Drew, considering that she was not the only female protagonist in a children's mystery series at the time of her publication, is that the "Nancy Drew Mystery Stories were mystery stories first and foremost" (Inness 165). While other girls' mystery series like the Dana Girls series and the Kay Tracey series featured female protagonists who were confined to identities of the school girl or the whining girl who is easily disparaged by males and romantic interests, Nancy Drew was "celebrated for her remarkable independence" and "extraordinary mental prowess" (Inness 165).From this, we see the unique ways in which the detective genre, and Nancy Drew specifically, combat the traditional literary stereotypes of female characters.

But the detective genre is unlike the fantasy genre of princess narratives,. Merida countered the stereotype that Disney created of princesses by breaking the illusion of a weak, dependent daughter of royalty. She was an unprecedented example of a princess who could achieve happiness in life without needing a prince to save her. On the other hand, rather than directly combating the stereotype of the weak woman who constantly needs protection, which is the pre-existing expectation of the female protagonist in princess storylines, detective fiction creates space for a woman to step into traditional male roles, carry out the same actions, and achieve the same results. Instead of reforming the notion of a role that has already been accepted by its audiences as appropriate for women, Nancy Drew deliberately treads into territory which has predominantly been reserved for men.

Aggressive, Outspoken, and Much Too Flip

Now it might seem that Nancy Drew and Merida stand for significant progress in promoting non-stereotypic gender roles, though in different ways. However, the crux of what Nancy Drew reveals about gender perception is that there is a distinct difference between what a female character achieves in her storyline and her audience's responses to those achievements. It is not enough to look solely at the stereotypes that Nancy purportedly shatters by being a female detective. We must further look at how her unlikely achievements are received by her audiences and especially her critics.

In 1959, the *Nancy Drew* series up until that point was extensively revised in accordance with responses from its audiences. Photographers, curators, and writers Carole Kismaric and Marvin Heiferman detail this particularly notable evolution of Nancy Drew by explaining that while the

original Nancy Drew from the 1930s was described by critics as being "confident, competent, and totally independent," her revision in 1959 softened her to be more "sympathetic, kind-hearted, and lovable" (Kismaric and Heiferman). Similarly, Carolyn Carpan, author of *Sisters, Schoolgirls, and Sleuths (2008)*, writes that the "diluted Nancy Drew introduced in the late 1950s" was "a shadow of her former self" (Carpan). The revision to Nancy Drew's characterization illuminates an intriguing aspect of what happens when women venture into male territory, as Nancy does through her mere existence as a detective who is frequently more perceptive and deductive than her fictional male peers. No matter the magnitude of her achievements, critics are quick to find flaws in her traits according to their innate expectations, and she is ultimately judged for her human attributes. From this, we gain a better understanding of how children's detective rhetoric addresses gender portrayal as the audience response to the original Nancy Drew demonstrates a public discomfort with non-stereotypic gender roles. It shows that because Nancy conforms neither to the prototype of the detective (because she is a woman), nor to the prototype of the woman (because she is strong, independent, and clever), she must be reimagined to ease the tensions surrounding her character. It is not insignificant that Nancy Drew has faced these struggles, because the criticisms and expectations she has been evaluated by have also determined how women in spheres of society are held to different standards and judged for their characteristics.

Nancy Drew for President

"Women are seen through a different lens. It's not bad. It's just a fact. It's really quite funny."-Hillary Clinton (Humans of New York)

The idea of women participating in areas traditionally dominated by men has contemporary implications far beyond fictional detective settings. In a *New York Times* article published in 2017, writer Susan Chira collects the stories, through nearly two dozen interviews, of businesswomen who felt the all-too-familiar shackles of gender stereotypes in the workplace. Her findings indicate that "women are often seen as dependable, less often as visionary," which is strikingly similar to our conclusions from analyzing children's detective fiction (Chira). From this, we see at the rudimentary level that there exist the same biases towards women in the workplace as those that are present in 19th-century detective literature. Additionally, Chira notes that "men remain threatened by assertive women," the consequences of which are summarized nicely in an article published in *The Economist* in 2003. The author of the article asserts that there are so few women running big companies because "aggressive male leaders are admired; female ones are disliked" ("The Trouble with Women"). This is particularly troublesome because it hinders a woman's self-concept and worth. As women receive cues in this constant feedback loop, they change their outward self to conform to what is expected of them. In a study

presented at the Academy of Management, "26% of male owners but only 5% of female ones wanted to be thought of as an authority figure" demonstrating the extent to which gender expectations infiltrate workplace interactions and dynamics ("The Trouble with Women"). Just as the original Nancy Drew was changed to be less assertive due to claims that she was not feminine enough, businesswomen similarly alter their external characteristics to appease their coworkers.

The political landscape is another in which gender role expectations carry ramifications that highlight inherent gender inequities. Research on how gender affects politics, including that conducted after Hillary Clinton's loss in the 2016 U.S. presidential election, showed that "it's harder for assertive, ambitious women to be seen as likable, and easier to conclude they lack some intangible, ill-defined quality of leadership" (Chira). Hillary Clinton's 2016 campaign is particularly relevant to our discussion since it represented, in many ways, the same revolutionary notions as the reality of Nancy Drew. As the first woman to be the presidential nominee of a major American party and the first woman to formally launch a major candidacy for presidency, Hillary Clinton shattered numerous centuries-long trends. However, perhaps the most irrefutable similarity between Hillary Clinton and Nancy Drew lies in the backlash that they – more specifically, their characters – received. The "fury and revulsion aimed at Mrs. Clinton," combined with the "open misogyny" throughout the election only scratch the surface of the "visceral recoil against women taking power in any arena" (Chira).

In an interview published in September 2016 with photographer Brandon Stanton, founder of *Humans of New York*[1], Clinton recounts her journey navigating the delicate process of running for president as a woman. On the issue of the lack of female role models in politics, she says women "have to communicate in a way that people say: 'OK, I get her.' And that can be more difficult for a woman. Because who are your models? If you want to run for the Senate, or run for the Presidency, most of your role models are going to be men" (Humans of New York). And on the topic of being judged differently for being a woman in the field, she says "what works for [men] won't work for you. Women are seen through a different lens. It's not bad. It's just a fact. It's really quite funny" (Humans of New York). For Clinton, this means that she has found herself adjusting her outward self even if it isn't a reflection of her true feelings. She says "I've learned that I can't be quite so passionate in my presentation. I love to wave my arms, but apparently that's a little bit scary to people. And I can't yell too much. It comes across as 'too loud' or 'too shrill' or 'too this' or 'too that'" (Humans of New York). These snippets of her full interview for

[1] Humans of New York is a photoblog which "began as a photography project in 2010" to catalogue the inhabitants of New Yorkers on the street. It has evolved into a collection of thousands of stories of people around the world, and has amassed over 18 million likes on Facebook and 6 million followers on Instagram (Humans of New York).

Humans of New York echo exactly the consequences of our close reading of Nancy Drew and the situations surrounding her. Just as there existed a lack of female detectives before Nancy Drew, Clinton notes the lack of female politician role models. Just as the original Nancy Drew received harsh criticisms for her intrusion into the detective field, Clinton recognizes that women are seen differently in politics. And just as Nancy Drew was altered to be a less outspoken version of her former self, Clinton alters her own actions to satisfy her critics. Her candid responses pinpoint how gender construction influences the perception of details as small as how we talk and move our hands. This first-person account of the struggles facing women in politics summarizes many aspects that have been discussed regarding female role models, expectations of women, and criticisms of their characteristics.

A Cold Case

When we consider these sentiments and compare them to the revisions made to Nancy Drew's character in 1959, we see that the response to women in business and politics has been, and still is, eerily similar. The essence of what happens when women venture into spheres traditionally cut out for men is that they are first treated according to marginalizing social expectations, and second rebuked if they demonstrate the same characteristics that are often praised in men. Framing these issues with Nancy Drew highlights the tensions that continuously define what women achieve and how they are perceived or judged for their achievements. It is apparent that women have encountered difficulties in establishing themselves as accomplished professionals given the restrictive assumptions imposed upon them. This is a dilemma common across Nancy Drew in detective fiction, businesswomen in the corporate environment, female politicians striving to affect change in the nation, and even female athletes in sports. If our analysis of Nancy Drew has just one takeaway, it is that the ways in which women are read are determined, to an unsettling degree, by the conventions of the situation they're entering in. From different genres of fiction to different *social* genres with varying expectations, this problematic trend must be addressed. The pursuit to somehow uproot deeply ingrained gender ideologies, and in their place sow open-minded, non-stereotypic thinking, can start with something as simple as focusing not on the "ponytail" of female Olympians (Wise) or the "curly golden bob" (Keene 2) of children's book characters, but rather on the merits of their impressive achievements in their fields.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Patti Hanlon, Associate Director of Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Stanford University, for her help in the early stages of developing the findings presented forth.

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