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## MALE GENDER-ROLE STEREOTYPES IN THE NEW TEENAGE ROMANCE NOVEL

by Carl Hays

There is a new iteration of a big bucks book business based in several series of romance novels for teenagers and preteens. A recent issue of *INTERRACIAL BOOKS FOR CHILDREN BULLETIN*\*\* is devoted entirely to this phenomenon and is excellent reading for teachers, librarians, parents and any others who are concerned with the reactionary and sexist gender-role stereotypes which these materials glorify and, thereby, perpetuate.

Two of the series, *Wildfire* and *Wishing Star*, originally sold through the Scholastic Book Club, enjoyed access to an unscrutinizing mass market guaranteed by the long-standing trust that the Club selects only the best of literature for the young mind. Millions of copies have been snapped up, tens of titles have been

issued and other book clubs ride free with the tide. One series boasts upwards of two million copies sold, nearly 10% of the mind-boggling 180 million big sister Harlequin novels sold each year.

Surely, the overall effect of this pap left unchallenged would be to undo every worthwhile doing of the women's movement. The *BULLETIN*, mentioned above, will tell you how, why and what to do about it, and you are, therefore urged to read it. But the purpose here is to draw a bit more attention to one more facet of the teenage romance novel - the male gender-role stereotype.

For every gender-role stereotype by which these books entice the maiden to limit her reality, there is a male gender-role corollary.

## Girl

1. The primary objective is happiness. Happiness for the girl is to get that boy, that one right boy.
2. Clothes, makeup and jewelry make the looks. Looks make the girl.

## Boy

Where it's really at is to be the boy, the one right boy, by whom it is some heroine's primary objective to be gotten.

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### Male Gender-Role (Cont.)

For the girl, these messages are subtle enough, served in a mixture of sweetness and laughter where all the world is white, lives in single family homes with two parents, has plenty of money and no handicaps. For the boy, the message is insidious. It comes to him by inference through his female peers' expectations. Perhaps never knowing for certain what has come over him, he sets out to make her expectations a self-fulfilling prophesy. The reward for doing this skillfully is all too clear--he gets gotten by the best looking girl in the lot. He gets male peer recognition as well. There can be no doubt that if the boy wants the booty the shortest route for getting there is to fill the fantasy role model which the romance novel has helped the girl set for him. Never mind if it doesn't feel right; boys act out of their heads, not their feelings anyway.

A young man searching for the heroine's perfect fantasy model, should he be so dull as to not get the message from his female peers, need search no further than one of these novels to find the failure proof formula for how to be. Here it is - one hero described: muscles and a big chest; well proportioned; intelligent face; sensitive looking; shy; cute but not in a sweet way; more mature than the others; older; boyish, broad back; ruggedly handsome; an alluring profile; regal nose; high brow; dresses nicely; normal; and an infectious smile.

It is no less certain how to be the loser. Nearly every one of these formula heroines has a female sidekick. She, of course, has a boyfriend too. But it is this poor shmuck through whom it becomes clear how not to be.

Sadly, all too often it is the fulfillment of both the how to be and how not to be of the male gender-role models for the youngsters in these novels which is the source of the stress in adult relationsWj PbecxWj PodsoFBPhxFBPexFBP, xFdsHoxLWPtxLWP x-"ZPthei r xTWLWPH

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Alternative Press (cont. from p. 1)

In These Times, as well as from issue oriented newspapers like Akwesasne Notes and Mountain Life and Work. A user of the Index could be referred to in-depth feature articles from the Nation, Mother Jones, Dissent or the Progressive, or to articles from a topical journal such as the Berkeley Journal of Sociology, New Left Socialist Review, Labor History or Co-Evolution Quarterly. Coverage of the movement for Black Liberation is included from Freedomways and the Black Scholar; and help in finding non-racist, non-sexist children's books can be found in articles in the Interracial Books for Children

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