MASCUVINITIES IN ENGLISH CHILDREN’S LITERATURE
FROM A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

Alba Alonso Feijoo

Thesis submitted to the University of Vigo
Department of English, French and German Studies

November 2015
Supervisor: Dr. Celia Vázquez García
MASCU LINITIES IN ENGLISH CHILDREN'S LITERATURE
FROM A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

Alba Alonso Feijoo

Thesis submitted to the University of Vigo
Department of English, French and German Studies

November 2015

Supervisor: Dr. Celia Vázquez García

Universidad de Vigo
DEDICATIONS

I dedicate this work to my mother, who taught me never to say no to my dreams.

Thanks mum, could not be more proud to have you as a mother.

I also dedicate it to my husband and children for being main parts of my study, both literary and metaphorically speaking.
I would like to thank my supervisor, PhDr. Celia Vázquez, for her patience, kind guidance, and valuable advice. I would also like to thank my family: my husband and two children for their understanding of this long dedication, and my school for having supported me on my decision of leaving work for some time to devote myself to the completion of this dissertation.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**Introduction**  
9

**CHAPTER 1. THEORETICAL APPROACH ON GENDER AND MASCU LINITIES**  
15

1.1. Introduction to the feminist movement  
15

1.1.1. Men and their relation to feminism  
18

1.1.2. Men's studies and their scholars  
25

1.2. Definition of terms in the gender spectrum  
27

1.2.1. Sex conceived as a biological concept  
30

1.2.2. Gender assumed as fluid and performative  
32

1.2.2.1. Gender identity  
33

1.2.2.2. Gender expression and its labels  
38

1.2.2.2.1. Clothes and colors  
38

1.2.2.2.2. Careers  
43

1.2.2.2.3. Toys  
46

1.2.2.3. Advances in gender interpretation in recent times  
54

1.2.2.4. Queerness  
57

1.2.3. Sexuality as sexual attraction  
60

1.3. Women vs. men literature  
62

1.4. The search for the limits between masculinities and femininities  
66

1.5. Conclusion  
75
CHAPTER 2. THE PROCESS OF REACHING ADULTHOOD FOR BOYS,
ITS IMPLICATIONS AND CONSEQUENCES

2.1. A historical approach to the boy crisis

2.1.1. Analysis of the causes of the boy crisis

2.1.1.1. The postulation of boys maturation process
as natural and innate related. 81

2.1.1.2. The postulation of boys maturation process
as a constructed and socialized concept 88

2.1.1.3. Girls as main generators of the boy crisis 97

2.2. Theories on gender, boys and their maturation

2.2.1. Cognitive developmental theory 100

2.2.2. Gender identity in children growing as boys 102

2.2.3. Gender expression in children maturing as boys 103

2.2.4. Sexuality in children maturing as boys 110

2.3. Current practices to abolish gender stereotypes 114

2.3.1. Possible changes to be carried out through education 114

2.3.2. Successful campaigns against gender marketing 116

2.4. Conclusion 119

CHAPTER 3. THE EXISTENT BOND BETWEEN BOYS
AND CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

3.1. How the “hidden curriculum” affects boy's reading habits 120
3.2. Studies about gender stereotypes in children's literature 122

3.3. Analyzing gender in children's literature 126
   3.3.1. Gender roles in children's literature 126
   3.3.2. The power of discourse and sexist language in children's literature 128

3.4. Relationship between boys and the literacy sphere 131
   3.4.1. Different practices carried out to encourage boys to read; advantages and disadvantages 136
      3.4.1.1. Guys Read initiative 137
      3.4.1.2. Packing the classroom or school library with books filled with “masculine” topics or male protagonists 139
      3.4.1.3. Discarding traditional children's literature from school due to gender stereotypes 140

3.5. How to overcome boy's gender stereotypes in children's literature 145
   3.5.1. Turning to drama 146
   3.5.2. Subversion vs. morality in literary entertainment for boys 147
      3.5.2.1 Literature as part of a literary polysystem 149
      3.5.2.2. Subversive literature 153
   3.5.3. Using non-gender stereotyped children's literature in the classroom 156

3.6. Conclusion 159
CHAPTER 4. THE PICTUREBOOKS’ BOYISH SPHERE

4.1. Definition of picturebooks

4.2. Picturebooks. Who are they for?

4.3. Picturebooks. How they are structured

4.3.1. Picturebook parts

4.3.1.1. Cover

4.3.1.2. Dust jacket

4.3.1.3. Endpapers

4.3.1.4. Dedication Page

4.3.1.5. Title page

4.4. Pictures and words relation in picturebooks

4.5. Picturebooks. How to read them

4.6. Picturebooks in the classrooms

4.7. Boys in picturebooks

4.8. Masculinities “out of the box” in picturebooks

4.9. Conclusion

CHAPTER 5. The writing of the picturebook. Martin Is the Best

5.1. The plot of the story

5.1.1. Summary of Martin Is the Best

5.1.2. Second thoughts

5.2. The making-off phase

5.2.1. The characters

5.2.2. The layout
5.2.3. Parts of the pictureBook 224
  5.2.3.1. The dust jacket 224
  5.2.3.2. The cover 224
  5.2.3.3. The endpapers 225
  5.2.3.4. The back cover 226

5.3. The story line 226

5.4. Different picturebook techniques used 231
  5.4.1. Intertextuality 231
    5.4.2. Frames 233
  5.4.3. Story within a story 233

5.5. Conclusion 235

6. CONCLUSIONS 237

Figures 242
Appendixes 244
Works Cited 246
Children's Literature 274
Resumen en castellano 279
Introduction

A thesis is an intricate and extensive document to produce, involving countless hours of research and dedication to a topic. I once believed that to be considered an expert on children’s literature, all you actually needed to master was English literature. Nevertheless, I am able to recognize now that being an “expert” on something is far more complex than what I had assumed. The wide variety of subjects I have confronted in my pursuit of expertise has revealed how broad a graduate student's intellectual foundation must be. Having an advanced college degree should not just be about proficiency in certain subjects and knowing nothing about the rest. A doctor who cannot argue about economy news, a lawyer who has no idea about political matters, a teacher who knows nothing about gender issues no
longer make sense in this global world. Being a graduate student should imply having acquired a wide general culture plus a distinct knowledge in a particular branch of certain studies; being a graduate student should allow you to support your view in front of others while engaged in any debate —no matter the topic— being a graduate student should leave you prepared for the outer world with regards to social relations, innovation, and entrepreneurial views; however, I believe this is accomplished rarely.

In a wish to be consistent with the aforesaid ideas I wanted my doctoral research to engage with several different disciplines—including anthropology, history, psychology, gender studies and neuroscience— to reach the unique topic I had chosen as its central theme. Anticipating the beginning of a long and complex path, I devoted myself to reading several books on how to write a good dissertation which highlighted the importance that I should enjoy not only the product but the journey. As a matter of fact, writing this work has not just meant another step towards obtaining a certificate, diploma, or my family's recognition, but a definite growth in my career as a researcher, teacher, and mother—which I twice became along the writing process—and above all, as a person.

Another premise I had always wished for my research to uphold was that of its practicality. I desire my work to be useful for my colleagues and me in our everyday teaching practice as users of children's literature. Equally, I long for it to spark more interest and research in children's literature studies. As I started investigating, I became aware of the numerous domains I needed access so as to obtain a complete understanding of my topic, the boy figure in the children's
literature. Despite the fact that some readers, or members of the Examining Board may find some of the following chapters to be marginal, extra, or even nonessential for lack of focused objective, I consider the way in which we reach certain conclusions bears no less importance than the outcome itself. It often happens that we work with ideas so evident and recognizable to us that we tend to use them as if they were true axioms, but we are not able to provide our audience with a clear justification of how we obtained those results. Thus, I have done my best to procure a wide variety of examples and reasons which will, if not wholly convince, at least disturb any reader's previous beliefs about the boy figure representation in children's literature.

Research for the first chapter of this thesis helped me gain the necessary understanding about gender identity to be able to properly confront the figure of the boy in children's literature in subsequent chapters. Not being an expert on gender, I felt an urgent need to know more about this world, seldom addressed in schools or in the pursuit of teaching degrees. **Chapter 1** works as an introduction to gender and its relation to masculinities, which stands as essential knowledge in the path to creating a world free of gender stereotypes in the children's literature, since gender theory is a strange universe for most people. This research has made me acknowledge a great deal of ignorance and mistaken preconceptions I have internalized throughout my life regarding gender. Hence, this chapter's principal aim is to help readers see beyond the social status quo by provoking a feeling of uneasiness in their preset gender appreciations. This task will be carried out by analyzing gender from its three most important aspects: identity, expression and
sexuality. These three sides will be not only defined, but constantly exemplified with the aim of providing authoritative proofs to the readers. Different gender labels are shown as clearly influencing children as to which toys they prefer to play with, the types of clothes and colors they wear, and even the careers they choose. Masculinism is presented on the one hand as a complement to feminism on its path towards equality, but also as a detractor of the same movement which for some people seems to emasculate men. Furthermore, several scholars from different fields — psychology, literature, anthropology, education— will provide their expertise on masculinist studies so as to remind us that boys and men are also to be considered in gender studies. This chapter will highlight various advances towards the difficult goal of a more tolerant and free society.

Chapter 2 takes us directly to the boy theme and the crisis which seems to surround his figure. Science appears to provide us with clues about the differences between genders in an attempt to understand the origin of this crisis. Two different sets of opinions are introduced: those who believe biological differences are ultimately responsible for divergent attitudes and behaviors between genders; and those who believe that the wide gap in gender identity is the result of social factors. In between, there is a logical truth supported by neuroscience which connects both sides. This scientific field, devoted to finding out how neurons work in our brain through the connections they conduct, invites us to see how things are not as simple, or as black and white, when the brain is involved. This organ is composed of millions of neurons whose interconnections make us who we are; yet, these interconnections choose one or other direction according to the environment which surrounds us. As a
consequence, our background greatly influences the way our neurons connect, which accordingly provokes certain responses. We may as a consequence say that children's literature is also partly responsible for the way our neurons develop connections depending on certain content as we may see in the next chapter.

**Chapter 3** engages the image of the boy through the lens of children’s literature. The so-called “hidden curriculum” has its say in what boys think about themselves. The way teachers manage gender in their lessons, —through gendered formats such as text books or stereotyped children's literature— supposes a great influence at the time of boys choosing what to read, if they are able to conclude that reading applies to them too. Once more, opinions come to light in opposite pairs; supporters versus censors of traditional children's literature, as well as supporters versus censors of non-gender stereotyped children's literature. I will continue exposing different studies concerning gender in children's literature throughout time and the advances which may have taken place. Roles and language will be analyzed as crucial elements in performing gender as well, leaving the power of the image to be examined in the following chapter. We will also reflect on how and why boys do not consider literacy and reading as part of their universe, regarding it as something effeminate only allowed and praised in girls, and what practices may be carried out to overcome this problem. I will conclude this chapter by explaining how we should face boys' gender stereotypes in children's literature so as not to be engulfed by them.

Once I considered I had learned enough about the relation between boys and children's literature, I wanted to get closer and deeper into this boy's books world, and picturebooks remained the best option. Hence, **Chapter 4** deals with
picturebooks and the often overlooked theory behind them on the one hand, and the significant influence the words-image link may have on children on the other. We will learn about the importance of engaging even the minute details of the book and how children are likely to perceive them without having our knowledge of text deconstruction by simply reading and rereading many times, something which they enjoy doing. The end of this chapter will be devoted to enumerating several picturebooks in which different masculinities “out of the box” will be disclosed.

Last but not least, we will arrive to Chapter 5 where the making of the picturebook takes place. All the knowledge acquired in the previous four chapters will come into practice in this chapter as we examine the successful process of creating and publishing a picturebook titled *Martin Is the Best*. Some of the illustrations present in the book will also be revealed in this last chapter. However, I have personally decided not to include all of them to preserve the “surprise effect” for the Examining Board at the time of the presentation of this doctoral dissertation, as they will each be handed a sample of this book.

Even though the first plan of this thesis did include a sixth chapter in which the use of *Martin Is the Best* in a primary school was meant to be explored, I have considered that this will better be postponed for a future field study upon which to extend this present dissertation. In it we will analyze different student's responses towards this book, and how the use of children's literature that presents other than the hegemonic masculinity may affect children at the time of understanding what being a boy or a man means.
CHAPTER 1. THEORETICAL APPROACH ON GENDER AND MASCULINITIES

Feminism is going to make it possible for men for the first time to be free

(Floid Dell)

1.1. Introduction to the feminist movement

I first became acquainted with this quote in a lecture by Dr. Michael Kimmel delivered to the students of Middlebury college in Vermont, and later broadcasted on the internet. What astonishes me the most about Dell's words is that they were written over a century ago, many years before the modern feminist movement found
its voice. Thus, we can confirm that feminism, and the complementary masculinism, are not concepts which sprang to life in the 1970s or 1990s as many of us have always presupposed but they had deeper reaching roots. It was only a matter of time before somebody stood up and presented their ideas on gender equality, enabling progressive development.

The first wave of feminism, neologized retrospectively by the second wave movement, took place between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. Lasting results from this movement means the world was finally starting to realize these “other” human beings referred to as women possessed valuable social and intellectual contributions, and the clear right to broadcast them openly, freely, and as loudly as possible. The second feminist wave dates back to the 1970s and went approximately as far as the 1990s. This wave, also known as “The Women's Liberation Movement” or “The Feminist Movement”, laid the foundation for women’s expanded enrollment in the labor market among other conquests. This new feminist project was meant “to demystify the mechanisms that assumed given gender roles according to physical sex” as signaled by senior lecturer Charles Butler (5). Women were now “authorized” to work both outside and inside home. Regrettably, what women came to understand was that, far from liberating them, this new circumstance implied multiplying their amount of obligations, since domestic tasks were and often still are considered as “feminine” or “women's” tasks. Some outstanding combative members belonging to the feminist movement worthy of mention are Simone de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan. The former introduced the concept of “the other” as applied to women constantly suffering from rejection and
isolation while living in patriarchal societies. Indeed, one of Beauvoir's most popular works *The Second Sex* has left us unforgettable feminist slogans such as “One is not born a Woman, but rather becomes one”, referring to how being a woman is no more than a constructed concept, reflection which will be later developed in this dissertation. It must be highlighted how Beauvoir's work highly influenced the latter, Betty Friedan. Widely hailed as 'the mother of the feminist movement', Friedan wrote *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963, a central text for feminist claims.

The third feminist wave, which is still on the run, wants to operate in a much more worldwide sense. This movement aims to encompass all races, nationalities, religions, and ethnicities so as not to regard femininity only “under Western eyes”, alluding to Mohanty's article (“Under Western Eyes”), something the previous wave had been accused of perpetrating. Some of the third wave feminists who, from my point of view, deserve explicit recognition for their ability to reach a wider audience are Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards. These two women co-authored *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism and Future* in 2000, a successful work that aims to awaken active feminism in us; and serves as a call for a return to the feminist movement which was suffering a lethargic phase at the time. *Manifesta* actually provoked some reactions, some of which are displayed in one of their followers work *Click*, a compendium of different women's exact moment of feminism auto-accomplishment written by Courtney E. Martin. As regards a possible fourth wave much has been said, albeit the difference is mainly expressed in the aid that social media —internet, blogging, tweeting— has meant to the spread of the feminist word in a worldwide sense.
Feminist activist Jennifer Baumgardner discusses the differences between all these waves and to what extent such differentiation really matters in her book *F 'em!: Goo Goo, Gaga, and Some Thoughts on Balls*. She instructs the reader that, “if you think too hard about the criteria for each label, the integrity of the waves disintegrates rapidly and they eddy into one another, the way ocean waves do” (Baumgardner 244). The conclusions Baumgardner reaches are that no matter how feminists are referred to, whether it is gender feminists, equity feminists, or any other designation the main point is that they tend to converge in a core goal, which is mainly focused on realistic equality between women and men.

1.1.1. Men and their relation to feminism

Meditating on how Floid Dell acknowledged men as free thanks to feminism, the determining issue could be: weren't men at that time jealous of all these successful uprisings of the “weak sex” witnessed from their usual position as advantaged beings? On the one hand men might have pretended not to, as they did not consider worrying about men or gender as a necessity, but on the other hand they must have felt threatened to some extent by such outrageous women's movements and their growing accomplishments. At present, most men's lack of apparent preoccupation as regards this same issue is contemplated by sociologist Kimmel in his work *The Gendered Society* by saying that: “when you are 'in power' you needn't draw attention to yourself as a specific entity, but, rather, you can pretend to be the generic, the universal, the generalizable (7). Kimmel illustrates this feeling of supremacy through an easy comprehensible example. It is compulsory for web pages
having Spain as their main origin or base to conclude with the domain .es, so must
the German ones with the letters .de, the French ones with .fr and so on. In contrast,
websites from the USA may broadcast with the universal domain .com (Gendered 7).
Once more, as Kimmel affirms, “privilege is invisible” (“Why Men” 107) just as
gender is unseeable in men and so are men imperceptible themselves as human
beings. Indeed, if we carry out the mental exercise of closing our eyes and naming
the first image that comes to mind when we are said a word, it is surely a woman and
not a man we will see when we hear the word “gender”.

The concept that men have no gender is so deeply instilled in our society that
they may take any and all subsequent advantages without being penalized for it in
any way —something men are definitely aware of. Another example to which those
in the academic community have likely been exposed to unconsciously is the naming
of the congresses we have regularly attended. Often when congress’ organizers bear
a particular interest in providing a feminine view to its contents, they will simply
insert the word feminine to the title, with the consequence of drawing lots of women
and very few if any men as attendees. On the contrary, other congresses seem to be
in no need of having the word masculine added to its title, as it is presupposed that
whatever is not marked is naturally masculine.

Feminist theorist Monique Wittig once pointed out: “there are not two
genders. There is only one: the feminine, the 'masculine' not being a gender. For the
masculine is not the masculine but the general” (qtd. in J. Butler 27). Thus,
everything which surrounds men’s behavior from emotional coldness, outbursts of
aggression and toughness, all the way to academic failure is supposedly just natural,
i.e., related to their biological conditions. For instance, Ingrid Johnson offers the following observation regarding gender and classroom deficiencies: “when girls performed less well than boys, this was mainly seen as an intellectual shortcoming, while boys' poorer performances were mainly discussed in relation to shortcomings on the part of the school” (qtd. in Kimmel, “Boys and School”). This brings me back to one of Michael Kimmel's often repeated anecdotes in which a black woman ends up teaching a unique lesson while debating with another student in one of Kimmel's feminism seminars about their own reflection in the mirror:

That's precisely the problem,' responded the black woman. 'I see a black woman. To me, race is visible every day, because race is how I am not privileged in our culture. Race is invisible to you, because it's how you are privileged. It's why there will always be differences in our experience. (Gendered 6)

At this moment Kimmel, main speaker of the event, came to terms with an intangible though universal truth and had no other choice but to intervene:

Well,' I said, 'when I look in the mirror, I see a human being. I'm universally generalizable. As a middle class white man, I have no class, no race no gender. I'm the generic person! (Gendered 7)

What may be inferred from such remarks is that it becomes visible how the reign of the patriarchs has cautiously taught us that men are smarter by nature and that if women ever get as far it is only a consequence of putting all their interest into
the project. As fragile or exaggerated as these type of statements may seem to a wider audience, we are constantly engaging circumstances which confirm their veracity. As an example, in 2010 the University of Vigo decided to change the name of the “Degree in Telecommunications” to “Telecommunications Engineering”; while entirely superficial, the name change lead to a notable decrease in registration among women. The reduced enrollment of women can be attributed to society's disbelief in their ability to cope with what, a priori, appeared to be more complex studies. These types of considerations are directly related to the “stereotype threat” syndrome which will be dealt in the next chapter but revolves around the idea contemplated in Edita de Lorenzo's words:

There still remains certain feeling of strangeness when a girl decides to study engineering whereas it is celebrated when it is a boy the one who opts for such a career. And it happens that this is still a professional environment where there are not many women and even fewer in positions of responsibility, hence young girls still see it as a male profession. (*Bit*)

The women’s movement of the 1970s made men start wondering about themselves and their place in the world, something they had never done before, at least as a group and in an open way. Women were conquering realms which had previously only been confined to men, whereas men were not being given the choice of achieving the same for themselves regarding feminine roles. Many people would probably wonder why men, as longtime holders of the social upper hand, would want

---

1 Edita de Lorenzo is Director of the Telecommunications Engineering School of Vigo (Spain).
to change anything concerning gender. In the face of this apparently comfortable men's position, sociologist Michael Kimmel tries to discern reasons for men to desire gender equality; he claims that, “gender equality is good for men because it will enable us to have better relationships with women, better relationships with other men and better relationships with children” (*Debating* 25). He affirms that sexism may work for men as a group though not for individuals as “most individual men don’t feel powerful as a result of patriarchy; they actually feel rather powerless” (19). The individual man’s struggle with powerlessness and weaker position is also validated by author Rosalind Wiseman in her latest book *Masterminds & Wingmen*, in which she hopes to aid educators, parents, and all the boys related to them as regards boy's developmental behaviors. Wiseman, also author of the popular *Queen Bees and Wannabes*, embraced the positive response to her first work and took aim at the issue once more to help boys on this occasion. Wiseman’s personal and professional experiences greatly influenced her follow up. As the mother of three boys, she had always heard how much easier it was handling boys than girls, especially in their teens. Nevertheless, she later discovered that boys are not easier at all, they are just simply less communicative or open with the rest of us —behavior which is likely to be related to education and not natural conditions— making it easier for parents or relatives not to get involved; an approach she denounces as the big mistake. In opposition to this thinking, Wiseman highlights how the truth is that these boys are actually demanding help and attention more than anything: “We assume boys are easy because they keep quiet, and in the process we sentence them to a life of being misunderstood” (*Masterminds* 17).
Patriarchy has put boys inside a box, which Wiseman designates as “The-Act-Like-a-Man-Box” (28) that rules all their life; as a result it is hard for them to be talkative or emotional about any issue, which makes boys potential targets for depression and suicides.

Patriarchal tradition is not only andronormative but heteronormative as well, leaving no room for the “abject”; which is the other, the deviant, i.e., whatever is not regarded as normal (Ingraham 210). Notwithstanding, how do we define what a normal boy or a normal family is? American psychologist Ken Corbett seems to find no answer either as he affirms that rules are there before we even realize they are imposed norms, hence once more we tend to regard them as natural.

How do norms normalize the family? How does the normalized family then shape the boy? How do norms move cat's paws silenced and unthought? There they are before we
know it, in our living-room and without invitation. There they are on the playground in the brother's voice ('Dude don't throw like a girl') in the nanny's nod ('That's right, defend yourself like a man'). (Boyhoods 115)

Another scholar, Stephen Whitehead, also argues for the abolition of the patriarchal box when he states that, “men have much to gain, not least in achieving emotional well-being, empathy with others, quality of relationships, reflexivity and balance in their lives” (3). Renowned author R.W. Connell joins this discussion “to emphasize that men do have emotional troubles, that masculine stereotypes can be damaging, that men suffer from isolation, and that men too can hold hands and cry—this is not a bad thing” (The Men 5). Indeed, Connell also claims that the feminist waves of the 1970s were good for men because “men too suffered from rigid sex roles” (202). Later in the 1990s these and other experts started to discuss an emerging crisis in men dealing with the invisibility of their sex. As Kimmel states men are not invisible as political leaders, high-qualified professionals or scientists, they are invisible as men (Gendered 6). He goes on to exemplify this through university curriculums in which it is hardly possible to find any course on masculinities. If we do not make men visible and gender visible in men we will never achieve equality, one thing not excluding the other, as making gender visible in men does not mean making women invisible.

What is worse, if we even go as far as typifying everything related to the man's world as negative stating that women are more valuable and deserve better than men we will just be making the same mistakes as the machistas. There is a word in the Spanish language to define the opposite of machismo, and that is hembrismo,
no synonym found in the English language yet. This word designates a movement in which women feel they are not just equal, but superior to men. It is of great importance to signal how these groups of women are not seconded by all feminists who, on the contrary, mostly promote the equality of women and men and not anybody's superiority. Notwithstanding, these hembristas do appoint themselves as feminists too, which makes it a bit confusing sometimes for the general public. Among the hembristas I would include Christina Hoff Sommers who in her book *Who Stole Feminism?* affirms that there are two kinds of feminists; those who support equity feminism —where she positions herself— and those who support gender feminism, also called revolutionary feminism by Beatrice Faust (115), author and women's activist.

There are many different branches of feminism stemming from various ideological leaders and texts; however, a vital aspect of recognizing ourselves as feminists is that we are not obliged to follow a specific set of opinions. We are allowed the freedom to pursue goals of female empowerment and gender equality individually and collectively.

### 1.1.2. Men's studies and their scholars

As a consequence of all this brainstorming concerning men and feminism, the latter half of the 20th century saw a group of scholars beginning to congregate so as to organize and voice their thoughts about men’s place in society. Their debate led to the appearance of the first true masculinist studies. These investigations were, and still are, addressed by many as *men’s studies*, though following Michael Kimmel's
reflections I do also perceive this title to be erratic since basically all the other studies: history, literature, politics, etc. already stand as men’s studies. Hence, masculinist studies would reasonably prove as the best term choice. This new field of deliberation gave birth to a wide range of followers who, although at first sight seemed to be investigating the same field, actually meant to achieve different goals. Among the early masculinist approaches we encounter pop psychology with its founder Robert Bly, who produced the widely known work *Iron John*. Bly’s book is used as tool to try and introduce men to what, according to his view, “a real man” is. The title of Bly's book, *Iron John*, derives from one of Grimm's fairy tales and in it the author proceeds to portray the unsuccessful type of “soft man” that he claims feminists are looking for; meanwhile inciting men to return to a deep masculinity through mythology and poetry, what has come to be known as the mythopoetic movement.

Early masculinist endeavors included men’s workshops and reunions, initiatives which feminists vehemently opposed to as they considered them backlash attempts to bring down the women's movement. Let us see why in some cases opponents were not at all wrong in their fears, as some of these meetings were actually trying to take men back to outdated eras. Michael Kimmel for instance, reminds us how twenty five years ago psychologist Robert Brannon stated the four principal points for describing manhood which were; 1. the “sturdy oak”: which argues that boys must be stoic, tough, independent; 2. “give them hell”: this stance will lead boys to dare each other to show their superiority; 3. the “big wheel”: boys must avoid shame in every case; and 4. “no sissy stuff”: which does not allow boys
show their feelings since it is regarded as a feminine act; i.e., sissy behavior (qtd. in Pollack 23-24; Kimmel, “What about” 8). These four items, which have to do respectively with denying the feminine, holding power and status, withholding emotion, and finally being aggressive and daring (“Why Men” 105), do appear as a present motto for many of these men's groups leaders. David Gilmore in his article “Cultures of Masculinity” tells us about the three main traits of masculinity in most cultures, which are: protection, providing and potency (11), three P’s which place men over women in most spheres. The previous examples highlight some of the negative aspects masculinist studies encompass. The harmful past often associated with these radical chauvinistic masculinists creates an environment in which potentially useful studies and information are dismissed by feminists, a reaction on par with designating all feminists as hembristas.

1.2. Definitions of terms in the gender spectrum

Before delving any deeper into discussions on men and gender let us establish certain theoretical framework which will make some concepts related to gender easier to grasp —concepts which are sometimes confused or even swapped in their meanings, most of the time due to unawareness. The reason I regard words in particular and language in general as crucial in the embracing of gender identity is because, as it has been proved by linguists such as Sapir\(^2\) or sociologists such as Mead, it is “through language and interaction children acquire a social self” (Mead qtd. in Taylor 301). In fact whenever a child learns how to read, she or he is actually learning a code which exudes a particular gender ideology (301).

\(^2\) Edward Sapir was a popular linguist, known for his studies in the development of linguistics.
Among the words which contribute towards the internalizing of gender theory, which stand as fundamental in a basic approach to the gender sphere: sex, gender, and sexuality. Firstly, whenever I talk about Sex I will be alluding to biological sex, or more specifically anatomy, although not necessarily to the usual male/female binary—as this investigation has reinforced my belief that these are not the only categories. Secondly, the term Gender will be double edged: on the one hand I will make reference to gender expression as a social construction whose mission is to match a particular sex to certain roles, given likes and dislikes, and specific behaviors or attitudes—traditionally, in any patriarchal society the feminine gender will correspond to women whereas the masculine gender will be relied upon matching men. Nevertheless, this belief will also be refuted on many occasions throughout this chapter, since as it has already been remarked we may find masculine traits in a woman, just as feminine characteristics might appear in a man. The discussion of gender will also explore gender identification; which will include observations on how many societies believe there are three or more genders. It will also make use of Sam Killerman's edugraphic The Genderbread Person to submit how gender expression does not have to be directly linked to gender identity; i.e. one may identify as a woman and behave in a masculine way, and the other way around. Finally we will become acquainted with the term of Sexuality, which deals with sexual orientation and desire. If we happen to address this term from a patriarchal focus, heterosexuality will without a doubt stand as the norm; thus, men feeling attracted and having relationships with women and vice-versa. As with the aforementioned terms I will attempt to provide a wider range of perception
concerning sexuality in which options such as bisexuality or homosexuality will also be given their place.

Yet, it must be reiterated once more how sex, gender, and sexuality lack clear-cut definitions. The more we inquire into our beliefs, which tend to derive from our communal cultural heritage and personal experiences, the more options seem to appear. This was exemplified in how activist Sam Killerman acknowledged that being a true advocate in the gender subject did not prevent him from overlooking several notions. Killerman is responsible for having produced *The Genderbread Person* graphic posted on his website\(^3\), an image that did in fact feature some gaps and flaws which were gently spotted for him by his own staunch followers. As a consequence, Killerman felt obliged to revise his *Genderbread Person* and his subsequent *The Genderbread Person v2.0*\(^4\) so as to include the amendments proposed, which left us with the new *The Genderbread Person v3.3* exposed below. Notwithstanding, as more and more people encounter this illustration more adjustments are likely to be made to it, for the reason that gender must be understood as an open, fluid, limitless concept.

---

\(^3\) Link to original *The Genderbread Person*: http://itspronouncedmetrosexual.com/2012/01/the-genderbread-person/

\(^4\) Link to *The Genderbread Person v2.0*: http://itspronouncedmetrosexual.com/2012/03/the-genderbread-person-v2-0/
The Genderbread Person v3.3 aims to make gender-related terms more accessible for those to whom this subject exudes novelty, or for those who have just never really had the need to contemplate any of these circumstances as everything used to be plain enough for them.

1.2.1. Sex conceived as a biological concept

Judith Butler was one of those feminists who loudly questioned about the meanings of sex and gender. “Can we refer to a 'given' sex or a 'given' gender without first inquiring into how sex and/or gender is given through what means? And what is 'sex' anyway? Is it natural, anatomical, chromosomal or hormonal” (Gender Trouble 6). As previously stated the sex concept is not as clear as many of us may have always perceived it; in fact, the meaning of the word sex presents a mistaken
tendency to be uniquely related to sexuality. In order to avoid misunderstandings let us have a look at the definition that the APA provides for the word sex, which is as follows: “Sex refers to a person’s biological status and is typically categorized as male, female, or intersex — atypical combinations of features that usually distinguish male from female. There are a number of indicators of biological sex, including sex chromosomes, gonads, internal reproductive organs, and external genitalia” (“Definition of Terms”). However, we tend to simplify this question as a simple reference to genitals. By APA standards people are not always one hundred percent male or females but there is a chance we will be somewhere in between. This natural variance has the potential to become a heavy burden in a society which does not allow place for any other option beyond the binary. As a consequence, there is a percentage of the population who may feel isolated, frustrated and depressed not due to their biological conditions but rather because society rejects their deviation from the gender binary.

Being born intersex, also known as DSD, has lead many children to undergo surgery wishing for results which are not always the correct or desired ones. For this reason countries such as Germany have promoted the abolition of the sex personal data at the time of registering newborns (Alemania Crea). Steps such as these allow parents, offspring, and experts more time to analyze the development of the child and in some cases wait until the child is grown so as to respect the person's own decision for any kind of surgery.

Once more, it is undeniable that sex is a constructed term. Who determines

---

5 APA: It stands for American Psychological Association.
6 DSD: It stands for Disorder of Sex Development.
what the limit between being a man, a woman, or an intersex being is? In fact, since we are the only ones to state the frontiers those could never be regarded as natural terms.

Humans (today, typically doctors) decide how small a penis has to be, or how unusual a combination of parts has to be, before it counts as intersex. Humans decide whether a person with XXY chromosomes or XY chromosomes and androgen insensitivity will count as intersex. (“What is intersex?”)

It would be easier to remove the binary characterization in order for these people to be themselves without having to “be adjusted” to any kind of category. Indeed, why not a third sex or why not no-sex category to define an individual? I doubt whether we will achieve such a utopian universe in which no kind of sex label will be needed. At present we are demanded to reveal our sex in almost every context and circumstance, whether it is a job interview, a university course enrollment, or a home-ware magazine questionnaire, i.e., situations in which those details are not in the slightest indispensable information.

1.2.2. Gender assumed as fluid and performative

As regards the meaning of the word gender we must clarify how it is not a feature or thing we possess but rather something we do. It was in Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* that the performative nature of gender (24-25) was first explored through denoting how every single detail from clothing, occupation, emotional habits, or physical skills were actually part of this so-called gender performance.
Butler proposes that gender is made up of daily and lifelong actions, interactions, language, and rituals. ‘Performance’ doesn’t mean theatrical performance; it means any aspect of a person that relates to gender in any way. Details from clothing to occupation to emotional habits to physical skills are all part of gender performance. (qtd. in “Messy New Freedoms” 21)

1.2.2.1. Gender identity

A large variety of actions and interactions comprise the performative nature of our socially constructed gender identity. Kate Bornstein also indicates how “we are so sure of our ability to categorize people as men or women that we neglect to ask ourselves some very basic question: What is a man? What is a woman? Why do we need to be one or the other?” (55). Transgender people, i.e. people whose assigned gender does not match their gender identity, are the real proof that gender is a human construct. One of the latest, most popular cases is that of popular journalist Janet Mock. Working as an editor for the magazine *Marie Claire*, Mock decided to step out in 2011 and tell her story. Her aim was to spread awareness, gather support, and offer a lifeline for the transgender community. The target of persistent bullying in her youth, Mock continues to work tirelessly to help alleviate the suffering she knows many transgender teens and young adults face. After having written *Redefining Realness* in praise to transgenderism and what it implies, Mock is at present committed to traveling the United States talking about her book and its message. Janet Mock’s case is among a growing number of glaring examples in the face of traditional gender identification; providing a wide reaching testimony that
support exists, and young transgendered people may surpass all kinds of society's norms with a lot of bravery and perseverance. It must also be highlighted how one's identification as transgender does not require or imply hormonal treatment or surgery in every case, as Matt Kiley pronounces in his *Tranifesto* “transition is not all about genitalia” (“Ten Things Not to Say”).

In an attempt to provide a more theoretical and analytical view of gender, R.W. Connell proposes a four-fold model of the structure of gender relations: power relations, production relations, cathexis and symbolism. The power relations make reference to the concept of *patriarchal society*; they talk about the dominance of men and the subordination of women. The aspect of production relations discusses the division of labour; how women are paid much less for the same work and how they never get the highest positions, something which Connell designates as the *patriarchal dividend*. The third, cathexis, addresses the mental and emotional investment in the existing structure. And the final component, symbolism, is described as a most vital element in gender relations. As a matter of fact, the symbolic value elements like dress, gestures or make-up among others represent is observed as crucial in experiencing gender (*The Men* 25-26). Professor Emeritus John Stephens and Ken Watson affirm that “to degender social relations requires the resignification of masculinity and femininity so that they are not bounded and oppositional concepts” (*From Picture Book* 148).

Androgyny, a term which defines the quality of sharing or having both masculine and feminine traits was outlined by academic Carolyn Heilbrun as a “spirit of reconciliation between the sexes; it suggests, further, a full range of experience
open to individuals who may, as women, be aggressive, as men tender” (x). What is true is that far from reconciling genders, androgyny actually disturbs many people. Being cisgender themselves, these people tend to align certain gender expression with particular biological or physiological traits and a specific sexuality, thus feeling tremendously uncomfortable facing individuals whose characteristics deviate. Over recent decades several methods have been established for measuring androgyny in human beings, most of them being based on the technique known as BSRI, which stands as the Bem Sex Role Inventory, introduced by Sandra Bem in 1974. The BSRI method consists of two parallel scales, one of which measures masculinity, and the other the femininity degree (see Appendix 1). Although this technique has been readjusted and updated overtime, it is still largely being used at present.

R.W. Connell also shares this view on how gender is not just another physical personal trait akin to having red hair or being left-handed since according to her, gender is a “domain of social practice” (The Men 18) and as such, a political term. Charles Butler, lecturer at the University of West England in Bristol, also exposes in “Experimental Girls: Feminist and Transgender Discourse in Bill's New Frock and Marvin Redpost: Is He a Girl?” how we cannot help to intervene in the gender system as “already-gendered subjects constituted by our repeated participation in that system” (7). Michael Kimmel argues as regard this theme that:

our identities are a fluid assemblage of the meanings and

---
7 Cisgender: this term refers to all those whose anatomical or biological features present at birth match their personal gender identity.
behaviors that we construct from the values, images and prescriptions we find in the world around us. Our gendered identities are both voluntary we choose to become who we are and coerced we are pressured, forced, sanctioned, and often physically beaten into submission to some rules. We neither make up the rules as we go along, nor do we fit casually and without struggle into preassigned roles.

(Gendered 94)

This last quotation reaffirms the theory on how gender is both socially and individually constructed. What is more, different research has encountered cultures in which there are as many as three or four genders. The Navaho, for instance, is a Native American culture which has got three genders: the feminine, the masculine and the nadle —those whose sex is not defined at birth. In fact, anyone could become a nadle if they wished. Most nadles are treated as women, an option which, as surprising as it may seem to many women in the world, turns out to be a privileged situation in this particular culture. Furthermore, nadles may marry men or women without losing their status. More extraordinary to Western heterogender eyes might be the Nahane, another Native American culture in which people count four different genders from which to identify; the two conventional ones —feminine and masculine — plus two other options corresponding to any person wanting to cross gender. A man may become a woman through ceremonial acts; hence identifying as an alyha; or the other way around, a woman wishing to identify as a man may become a hwame. It is remarkable that the social status of an alyha or a hwame individual is not regarded as freakish or deviant and therefore a social fringe element (Kimmel, Gendered 64-65). The curious thing about these examples is that both cultures agree
that beyond men and women, other gender identities exist naturally and their culture accommodates them a social niche. Further evidence of how gender is a constructed concept may be found in China, specifically in the provinces of Yunnan and Sichuan where the Mosuo people remain one of the few matriarchal societies still in practice. Among the Mosuo, women are the only ones entitled to hold any property, possessions which are always passed down to another woman from the following generation. What is more, this culture promotes a “walking marriage” in which women choose as many men as they want, not to live with them but just to have sexual encounters (Stacey).

As early as 1935 anthropologist Margaret Mead published the outstanding work *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies*, text which has been recurrently used by feminists to validate their beliefs. This book discusses how three different cultures lived in such different ways that any theory supporting biological inevitability concerning gender would fail to succeed. The first culture is the Arapesh in which both men and women are maternal, domestic, happy, and confident: i.e., utopia itself (Mead 159). The second culture Mead studies is the Mundugamor in which both men and women are quite similar too, but this time there is a shift to more violent, aggressive, non-maternal terms (Mead 251). The Tchambuli constitutes the third culture being analyzed. Just like in the Western world the Tchambuli count with two well-defined groups: one devotes time to going shopping and adorning themselves with all types of jewelry; while the other group is in charge of fishing and holds the power in society being business-like, efficient and dominant. What we would never guess is that the first of these crowds is composed
of men while the other encompasses the women of that culture (Mead 273). All three tribes think their way of life is innate and hence, the appropriate one, being surely convinced that biology is the only reason why they are so different from each other.

1.2.2.2. Gender expression and its labels

In truth, there is a wide range of population who do not feel at all comfortable when such concepts as sex or gender are not clear enough. If they happen by chance to initiate a conversation with a person who at first sight seems to have breasts but has a deep voice and a short hair cut they may not even know how to respond. In order to press sex and gender into more clearly demarcated areas, social pressures have resulted in many labels and expressions deemed appropriate for each sex. Professor Jo Paoletti has carried out many investigations on the shades' universe which prove that, shockingly as it may seem, it was not until the end of the 19th century that children started taking part in blue/pink fantasies.

1.2.2.2.1. Clothes and colors

At present, Dr. Paoletti is conducting a research project on the topics of clothing and gender, which invites reflection on historical trends in order to realize how our remarkably “biological fixed conceptions” are most of the times no more than constructed beliefs (qtd. in Delusions 207), fact which is also mentioned by Peggy Oreinstein in her book Cinderella Ate My Daughter. As Oreinstein says citing sociologist Jo Paoletti's work:
Children weren't color-coded at all until the early twentieth century ... What's more, both boys and girls wore what were thought as gender-neutral dresses. When nursery colors were introduced, pink was actually considered the more masculine hue, a pastel version of red, which was associated with strength. Blue, with its intimations of the Virgin Mary, constancy and faithfulness, symbolized femininity. (Oreinstein 35)

Moreover, in the 1920s boys and girls in the USA would wear blue or pink simply depending on their place of origin as can be seen in the chart below:

![Figure 3: Chart found at Jo Paoletti's website Gender Mystique](image)

Professor Melissa Hynes has also carried out different investigations as regards the blue/pink world which lead her to the following conclusions:

Both boys and girls prefer pinkish colors as infants, but by the age of about three years, boys avoid pink and girls show
a preference for pink. In adulthood, both men and women prefer blue to pink. These changes over time suggest that the social environment may influence the female preference for pink. Also, other research suggests that adults learn to prefer certain colors by having positive experiences with the colors. This suggests that girls may learn to like pink, because their toys, and other items that they like, are colored pink. ("Speaker Spotlight")

The main reason children used to wear white neutral clothes in the past until they were six or seven, was for its practicality as white clothes can be bleached (Paoletti 36); therefore, it was easier to remove stains from them. See here below an example of how both girls and boys used to dress.

Figure 4: Image from Jo Paoletti's website *Gender Mystique*

Nevertheless, nowadays any child wearing white, grey, or any other neutral color seems to bother many people as they appear to be in an urgent need for some gender or biological sex identifier to comfortably approach them.
The picture in Figure 5 is none other than President Franklin Roosevelt at the age of three. How would promulgators of hegemonic masculinity regard an American President wearing a dress? Nobody seemed to be alarmed at the time but they would surely have been if he wore it at age twelve, or had it been at present times. Another self-explanatory example comes from the Christian tradition of baptism, in which both girls and boys submit to the ceremony wearing long white gowns. Nonetheless, carrying out a brief search of christening gowns on the web, I have alarmingly already found the boy/girl distinction, which I never thought existed. For instance on the website www.christeninggowns.com both girls and boys have their own unique models under a boys or girls signage; a ploy that also highlights the negative influence of socially focused industries like marketing.

As it has hitherto been alleged, we are not biologically determined to be “blue” or “pink” as many people may think, neither literally nor metaphorically. The only reason girls tend to prefer pink rather than any other color whereas boys manifest a tendency to abhor pink is clearly a consequence of an unconscious, yet
tenacious, color-educative system of children on our behalf. Indeed, most of the things addressed to children seem to belong to either one of these two-shade worlds. As a consequence, boys are taught once and again that certain toys, clothes and accessories only belong to the girls' world; items which are, not by chance, mostly pink. Why would then a three-year-old boy like a pink doll after having been bombarded through T.V., cartoons, toy shops, parents, and educators how improper that is for him? To make it clearer, Paoletti includes a very explicit sample on her website Gender Mystique which would otherwise probably pass undetected by most of us. Who does not remember Peter Pan, Wendy, her brothers John and Michael, and Tinkerbell? The youngest boy, Michael, used to wear pink pajamas throughout the film. However, as pointed out by Paoletti, the 2013 special edition DVD dressed him in a blue gown instead. Was there perhaps fear of having little Michael appear as “too effeminate”? Would that make him less of a boy? We have also surely seen Tinkerbell in all possible pink versions as, though her original outfit used to include mainly green hues. A pink pastel shade seeks to make her somehow more “feminine”, in a wish to express all those “values” that any lady should represent: sweetness, love, caring, etc.

---

8 Gender Mystique web link: www.pinkisforboys.com
1.2.2.2. Careers

The modern gender-color relationship is also intrinsically linked to toys and roles. For example, a pink oven but a not-pink tractor involves many hidden messages, such as how women must do the cooking and stay more passively indoors whereas men must do the “hard” tasks usually performed outdoors. These sort of products attempt to influence us into believing that preferences are merely a direct consequence of one's inborn features. It is not a mere coincidence that most careers in engineering, architecture, or the many “hard sciences” are filled with men. See the following pie chart found at Goldieblox webpage.

Figure 8: Image from 2015 Tinkerbell

![Tinkerbell](image)

Figure 9: Pie from Goldieblox website
Even now as girls are starting to draw even, or in some cases outnumber boys in these studies, their potential is viewed skeptically on a social and personal level; while there is persistent belief that, as boys are supposed to naturally excel in the fields of mathematics and science, they will perform better than girls, even those who possess lower capacities. This phenomenon was named as the “Pygmalion effect” by professor Robert Rosenthal and teacher Leonore Jacobson in 1963; Jacobson was a principal at an elementary school and Rosenthal a psychologist investigating these effects. They carried out a study about how high expectations on pupils by teachers could imply a better academic performance; the results of which prove that boys will be able to perform better than girls at certain fields because they are usually more encouraged to push themselves, just for the sake of being boys.

The repercussions of the “Pygmalion effect” extend beyond the learning disparity. Even when women overcome the educational and gender barriers in place around industrial sectors like STEM\(^9\) jobs, they must confront workplaces dominated by men. Female pioneers in these traditionally male sectors, like Debbie Sterling, are working hard to combat this trend. Sterling, being an engineer herself, quickly felt out of place when her career started, as very few women were in the field. After giving it much thought, she decided it was about time girls had their own engineering toy-set, which would surely encourage more girls to take up engineering studies, or at least become more interested in STEM. This is the reason why Sterling chose to be an entrepreneur, to sell engineering construction sets addressed to girls, produced and marketed under the brand name *Goldieblox*. Even though *Goldieblox* marketing campaign is entirely addressed to girls, these toys can actually be used by

---

\(^9\) STEM stands for Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics.
anyone, no matter its emphasis on the typical feminine world.

Sadly, as much as I regard this as an admirable step towards more future equality in the technical fields, my personal criticism is that by leaving boys out of this project Sterling is actually not degendering the product, but gendering it again. Let me clarify this: Sterling wants girls to try other types of toys, toys which are marketed expressly for boys, and to achieve her goal she presents these toys in a more “feminine” package so that they will supposedly appeal to girls. On top of that, the advertisements which have been released also fail to include any boy in them. They have even categorized this as a I-don't-want-to-be-just-a-princess-type of campaign. Nonetheless, it omits from its audience boys who aspire to engineering but fail to follow the hegemonic masculinity standards. They will definitely be left out just the same as the owner of this company did when she finished her degree and went into the engineering men's universe (Sterling, “Inspiring the Next Generation”). By carrying out these type of initiatives we are still reinforcing the idea that certain toys are “girls' toys”. Do we really need blue engineering sets for boys and pink ones for girls? If this is true, we are strengthening the separation of boy and girls shelves we have so harshly criticized. Isn't this another step of pink-packaging “boys” toys? From my personal point of view, this company should not only incorporate boys in their marketing campaigns, but I would also prompt Goldieblox to comprise all types of boys and girls among their target customers; tomboy girls, posh-pink girls, boys wearing dresses, girls being superheros, doll-loving boys, etc. It is absolutely fine to offer a feminine presentation as long as it is not exclusive; we must not forget that children do come in many different “packages”, i.e., not just in a blue or pink sack by a stork from Paris, metaphorically speaking.
1.2.2.2.3. Toys

There are endless cases in which by using pastel shades, pink above all, or changing certain features —such as thinner waists and more curvy bodies—, several characters have been transformed in order to particularly appeal to the feminine audience. For instance, *Dora the Explorer*, a vastly popular animated cartoon whose protagonist is a girl that exudes gender neutrality in her clothes, physical features, and actions was transformed into a much thinner, “prettier” and “girlish” *Dora* in the teenage doll and cartoon versions. Here below you may see the original Dora and the new *Nickelodeon-Mattel* version launched in 2009 of teen Dora.

By employing this strategy toy companies expect to rise sales since girls seem to prefer *Barbies* or *Pinky TinkerBells* to neutral *Doras*, but what is true is that we are actually not providing children with much choice either. These cartoons primarily address little girls and boys no older than seven who should not be worrying at all about their appearance; hair, clothes, accessories, or body size.
Instead, these children should mainly be drawn to having fun, learning things about the world, getting dirty, being risky, trying things, and adopting values such as; eating healthily, having a good personal hygiene, being caring and affectionate, learning to take care of the environment, etc. We are clearly doing something wrong when a little five-year-old girl has a morning tantrum because she wants to go to school all dolled up. We are doing something wrong when a little seven-year-old boy does not want his goodnight kiss or be read a picturebook because he thinks those are girls' things. We are doing something wrong when simply changing the designation of a STEM career from “Degree in Telecommunications” to “Engineering Telecommunications” provokes a considerable decrease of girls' registrations in those studies as seen on page 21 of this chapter.

Another instance of this deliberate manipulation of a product has occurred with the brand Lego. This brand was considered as one of the greatest toy companies for children as it encouraged them to be creative and imaginative, while improving their neuronal paths through a visual and tactile experience. However, I must say that Lego truly disappointed their fans with the release of Friends in 2012\(^\text{10}\). In the following image you may see the Beauty Shop Set, part of the Friends collection.

\(^{10}\) I later found out they even had a worse just-for-girls toy version called BelleVille which had come out in 1993, that included girl pieces as princesses, housewives, and a witch.
This pink-purplish set is not only uniquely addressed to girls, something considerably reprehensible had it been just a color issue, but it horrendously reinforces gender stereotypes that designate the female sphere as either at home worrying about the housework and the children, or outside basically going shopping or to the hairdresser’s. What kind of messages are our girls being sent by this type of toys? Once more we need to realize how even a brand such as Lego, proud pioneer in the equality fight, went back to selling pink passive toys for girls; thus enhancing gender stereotypes in order to reap financial reward. These words may be proved from conjecture to truth by comparing the following set of photographs.
The image on the left corresponds to the 1981 Lego ad campaign, which uses gender neutral terminology and does not mention any gender in their toy-set instructions. Alongside the original we see Giordano, who is now a 37 year-old doctor working in alternative medicine, modeling again in 2014 to point out how marketing strategies are doing great harm on our society. As Gordiano affirms in an interview conducted by psychologist Lori Day:

In 1981 Legos were ‘Universal Building Sets’ and that’s exactly what they were...for boys and girls. Toys are supposed to foster creativity. But nowadays, it seems that a lot more toys already have messages built into them before a child even opens the pink or blue package. In 1981, Legos were simple and gender-neutral, and the creativity of the child produced the message. In 2014, it’s the reverse: the toy delivers a message to the child, and this message is weirdly about gender.
The first ad went viral when Lego released the Friends set so as to criticize what this same company had been exultant of selling in the 1980s. Accordingly, the toy company decided to publish a new version in an attempt to satisfy all their new detractors.

Figure 14: Lego ad in response to critics

As can be seen above it is true that the ad does not portray a hyper-feminine girl anymore, and the text which accompanies the image does talk about girls wanting to be explorers, builders or designers, instead of just models, housewives or shopaholics. However, the mistake lies now in how the ad suggests that the Friends set is only to be addressed to girls when there are many boys who would love to play with it and will accordingly feel left out. Therefore, we may conclude that the 1980s ad is still much openminded, inviting, and in a word: “beautiful”.

Fortunately, Lego responded to backlash and expanded the Friends set with more options in which girls could also be rescuers of animals in the jungle or veterinarians, for instance. Simply by making a few adjustments these companies do
actually hold the tremendous power to perform change in society's expectations and mentalities. The main issue is to comprehend and internalize that it is fine for both girls and boys to love pink, make-up, singing, dancing and shopping.

As sure as I am that there are not two equal children I can also affirm that being different is no objection to feeling attracted by the same color, toy, or career. No matter my personal critique of Goldieblox (see p. 45) which I consider too one-sided, or of Lego which seems to be now working on the right path, it is undeniable that as it has been previously demonstrated we are heartily trying to advance as regards our girls' options.

Then, why aren't we doing the same thing with our boys? I cannot but include hereabouts a popular quote from feminist and activist Gloria Steinem which states: “We've begun to raise daughters more like sons...but few have the courage to raise our sons more like our daughters”. We must be conscious of the fact that children are not passive recipients of their gender roles (Pascoe 151), as socialization is a key factor in their upbringing. Hence, the way we invite children to socialize with the world —through toys in this case—, also has consequences which cannot be ignored. While the case for boys will be elaborated further in the following chapters, we continue to observe instances in which girls are repeatedly stymied by the toys they are pushed towards. As an instance, even nowadays girls continue being discouraged to play with toys that will develop their large motor coordination and as a consequence, they only acquire small motor skills.

Another illustrative and even palpable example of this difference can be met in the ways toys are assembled. Toys mainly addressed to boys, such as action
figures, mostly have posable limbs inviting them to perform some kind of active
game. Nevertheless, most dolls present non-posable arms and legs, which in this case
claims for more passive kinds of play. This is one of the facts somehow forgotten or
simply dismissed about toys in relation to gender which was highlighted by Judy
Attfield in her article “Barbie and Action Man”:

The technical improvement added over the years to the joints
in the Action Man figure embodies the increasing possibility
of complex movement. Conversely, the simplicity and
minimal number of joints in Barbie suggests the priority
given to posing rather than action. (80)

Opposed to this gendered version of toys J Jlarson, referred by Lisa Wade
in her article “Refiguring the Passive Girl Toy”, has provided us with the proper
instructions\textsuperscript{11} to transform these toys.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{figure.png}
\caption{Image of non-poseable doll turned into poseable one}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{11} Instructions on how to make non-poseable dolls into poseable dolls:
Searching for examples of girl oriented action-figure, I was able to find the one exposed below; the only dilemma being that the action it promoted consisted of growing “tits” whenever you moved one of her arms, as if maturing and growing from girls to women was just a question of breasts' augmentation and skirts shortening.

Skipper, as this doll was named, was marketed as Barbie's little sister and generated a lot of controversy in 1975. That history of polemic did not prevent Mattel from producing a similar toy in 2002, Ginger, which not only grows higher in inches but also bigger in breasts.
With these appalling examples of “action figures” marketed to girls, the following information regarding gender preferences to targeted toys becomes logical. Unlike girls who are simply excluded from the intended audience of various toys, boys are often not only discouraged but forbidden to get near any “girlie” toy. A study was conducted in New York at SUNY Binghamton University in which three- and four-year-old-boys and girls were left alone in a room with six attractive toys; three commonly regarded as girls' toys and three as boys' toys. This experiment highlighted that the boys spent much less time exploring the girls' toys —21% of the time— than girls exploring the boys' toys —34% of the time. Furthermore, whenever the boys were in company of a girl, they would spend even less time playing with the “feminine” toys —just 10% of the time— as opposed to girls who spent 24% of their time enjoying with the “masculine” toys (Eliot 121). This data reaffirms the unconscious pressure little boys are obliged to live under. Psychologist Linda Brannon reminds us that: “the threat of being identified with a negative stereotype can be an ever present factor that puts a person in the spotlight and creates tension and anxiety about performance” (159). The results of the Binghamton study support the idea that at a very young age boys are under peer-pressure regarding their public actions and can often be driven to reject objects and ideas purposefully designated for girls.

1.2.2.3. Advances in gender interpretation in recent times

In 1935 *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies* was first published. Over the subsequent decades society has developed positively in terms of
gender relations, though probably not as quickly as Mead would have thought. Notable advances have been seen across a broad variety of platforms. For example recently the well known professional basketball player Jason Collins “came out” on the cover of *Sports Illustrated* magazine. In fact, having such a representative of *hegemonic masculinity*—famous, sporty, strong, etc—identifying as gay in front of the whole world set a turning point in our understanding of masculinity as related to sexual preferences.

The year 2014 also meant a huge step towards the visibility and recognition of more than just two gender options. Whether a marketing strategy or not, one of the most popular social networks, *Facebook*, welcomed 2014 with a piece of exceptional news. Its organization in the USA now provides members with 58 identification options in addition to the male-female binary: Androgyne, androgynous, bigender, cis, cisgender, cis Female, cis Male, cisman, ciswoman, cisgender female, cisgender male, Cis Man, Cis Woman, Cisgender Female, Cisgender Male, Cisgender Man, Cisgender Woman, Female to Male, FTM, Gender Fluid, Gender Nonconforming, Gender Questioning, Gender Variant, Genderqueer, Intersex, Male to Female, MTF, Neither, Neutrois, Non-binary, Other, Pangender, Trans, Trans*, Trans Female, Trans* Female, Trans Male, Trans* Male, Trans Man, Trans* Man, Trans Person, Trans* Person, Trans Woman, Trans* Woman, Transfeminine, Transgender, Transgender Female, Transgender Male, Transgender Man, Transgender Person, Transgender Woman, Transmasculine, Transsexual, Transsexual Female, Transsexual Male, Transsexual Man, Transsexual Person, Transsexual Woman, and Two-Spirit.
On December 12 of the same year the social network *Google +* joined this trend and began letting people opt between male, female, other and custom. The custom option will not only allow you to express your gender as you wish but also to detail how you would like others to address you. Additionally, you are permitted to withhold your gender identification entirely; an option I applaud, as this quality should be considered neither definitive nor static. Many people will probably wonder who dictates all these new gender options and where the limit is. Truly, the list could continue endlessly as we persist in accepting gender as a fluid and very personal concept capable of changes over time. This list embodies a great advance in the evolution of society's way of thinking and acceptance, though the most satisfactory choice would surely imply the abolition of all gender labels.

Another important progress concerning gender took place on April 15, 2014 when transgender people in India were recognized as the third sex by the Supreme Court. Transgender people and individuals not conforming to the gender binary are identified as *hijra* in the Indian culture. The *hijra* have a long history of social inclusion as well as participation in rituals and ceremonies, and only began to suffer discrimination in modern times. With this new law, the *hijra* community will be able to mark themselves as neither male nor female but “others” on their voter ID cards. Due to this positive result it is possible for transgender activists in India to push forward with the aim of expanding the “other” label. This type of exclusive ruling highlights the struggle still facing the many gender and sexual identity activists, often lumped together under the moniker of the queer movement.
1.2.2.4. Queerness

A field somewhere in between feminism and masculinism, queerness has been a topical issue for a long time. The queer label appeals to fluidity as opposed to stability in gender identity. According to Rebecca Rabinowitz the main goal of queer theory is to seek imbalance in the traditional paradigms of sex, gender, and sexuality through the discovery of inconsistencies, gaps, etc (19). Judith Butler outlines in *Gender Trouble*, her seminal queer theory text, that queer is a model for gender identity in which gender signifiers determine an individual’s gender, rather than originating with the label. Butler states that every single human has a different combination of signifiers which motivates everyone’s gender to be different; the standard definitions of male and female end up overlapping and consequently fade.

The fluid identity formed by internal and external forces in constant flux makes for a unique gender patchwork according to Rebecca Rabinowitz (22). As regards these patchworks Kate Bornstein affirms that, “expecting people to fall easily into categories of male or female is like ‘calling a rainbow black or white’” (*Gender Outlaw* 123; qtd. in Rabinowitz 22). Professor Judith Halberstam supports this position as well; in her important work *Female Masculinity* she maintains that we may encounter as many different genders as there are people (Dinshaw 72). Hence, queer theory does offer “a new language in which gender's fluctuation, fluidity and gaps are described as powerfully ambiguous and useful” (Rabinowitz 22) interpreting gender incoherency positively as natural or inevitable, a concept resisted by traditional gender definitions.

Binaries such as the female-male are defined with borders, according to Julia
Kristeva, and the more rigid the dichotomy appears, the more inflexible the borders are. Professor Annette Wannamaker refers to Kristeva's concept of abjection in saying that “the 'I' of dominant masculinity is often constructed against an abjected 'not I' that is decidedly feminine or queer” (29). Hence the abject, that represents the queer, constitutes a menace for the stability of the borders making them appear unreal (28). This unreality challenges patriarchal notions of society, making a considerable part of Western society feel distressful and uncomfortable. Connell concludes at the end of *The Men and the Boys* that “the task is not to abolish gender but to reshape it” (225). This is the main reason why both feminism and masculinism movements should be responsible, as pointed out by Carolyn Dinshaw, for “not merely integrating men into the private sphere and women into the public one, but creating more options instead” (78).

Referring back to the picture of *The Genderbread Person v3* presented on page 30 of this chapter, we find the word genderqueer positioned in between man and woman along the spectrum of gender identity. However, we cannot fail to add some other terms which also fall along this fluid scale. For instance, being cisgender actually emerges as a privileged state in such a stereotyped society as the one we live in. It may be regarded just as advantageous as being white or being a man in the Western world. *The Genderbread Person* creator Sam Killerman, is also a performer and author of the blog *it's pronounced Metrosexual*, where he has made an extensive list of cisgender privileges that often go unnoticed (*30 + Examples of*). Outside the cisgender identity there is genderqueer, in which one's anatomy and how one identifies deviate from conventional traits. Lamentably, genderqueer people, the
young in particular, are prone to continuous torment, oppression and bullying; the resulting trauma often causes lasting psychological damage, even suicide.

In 1989 the rate of youth suicide was so high in the United States that a “Report of the Secretary’s Task Force on Youth Suicide” was commissioned. Academic scholar Eve Kosofsky surmises from the report’s findings that gay youth were constantly being harassed by peers and family and it intended to work as a wake-up call to put a stop to discrimination against children and teenagers due to their sexual orientation (18). Jonah Mowry is a survivor of bullying that targets effeminate or gay teens. On November 8, 2011 at the age of fourteen Jonah recorded himself on video explaining his frustrating personal state. He feared being unable to handle the bullying harassment he was going through; he even shared how he had actually attempted suicide on several occasions through this process. The video was when Jonah first “came out”; his parents were previously unaware of what he was going through, but it resulted that he was able to receive help and support. It went viral within a few days and served as a reminder that many children might be living with similarly heavy burdens. The recording also asked others to respect anyone in a similar situation, and inspired children or teens who identified with Mowry’s situation to share their stories as well. Unfortunately not every boy is as lucky or as brave as Johnan Mowry was, therefore it is also the responsibility of adults to act as mentors and provide these children or teens the necessary support and assistance so as to avoid replicating the situation.

It is important to highlight that queer does not only indicate gays, lesbians or bisexuals as it is commonly presumed. Calvin Thomas in his article “Straight with a
Twist” praises Judith Butler's words in *Bodies That Matter* when she says “straights for whom the term expresses an affiliation with antihomophobic politics” (qtd. in Thomas 19). Thomas celebrates the way straights, i.e. heterosexuals like him, possess their space in queerness too.

### 1.2.3. Sexuality as sexual attraction

Sexuality does not arise as solid and immutable as we perceive it. Lamentably, heterosexuality is still assumed as the only naturally occurring sexual identity. These long standing traditions view any person who practices homosexuality, bisexuality, or alternative sexuality as an anomalous being and therefore an outcast deserving mockery and exclusion from many sectors of society. Sociologist Chrys Ingraham alludes to Lacan's vision of “the imaginary” in describing the heterosexual imaginary as a “way of thinking which conceals the operation of heterosexuality in structuring gender and closes off any critical analysis of heterosexuality as an organizing constitution” (*Heterosexual* 203). Ingraham also claims how the gender concept carries an assumption of heteronormativity that leaves no other choice: “To become gendered is to learn the proper way to be a woman in relation to a man or feminine in relation to the masculine” (215). We should then ask ourselves, is there really a fixed norm as regards sexuality? Is it natural that men are prone to libertine behavior while women must look for the correct partners and fathers of their descendants? Does nature and biology thereafter justify some men's behavior in being unfaithful? Rebecca Rabinowitz comments on how “stereotypical discourse constructs female sexuality as passive or receptive,
male sexuality as active or assertive” (25).

In support of the claim that sexuality roles are social constructs not naturally inherent are the Bari people of Venezuela. In The Gendered Society we are told how the Bari women tend to be as promiscuous as possible so as to guarantee the future provisions for their progeny. Any time a Bari woman suspects she is fertile and whereupon may get pregnant, she will try to have sexual encounters with as many men as possible. These women will attempt in particular with those who possess the capital to assure the child's maintenance, because whoever believes they might have got a woman pregnant will feel obliged to provide for the child. Conversely Bari men do try not to have an excess of sexual meetings with women or, “they would end up rather exhausted and haggard from running around and hunting and gathering for all those babies who might or might not be their own” as Kimmel remarks (Gendered 31). Additionally Bari male partners develop a more monopolizing attitude towards their mates when they begin ovulating in order to prevent them from having too many sexual contacts.

It was Freud who signaled that “adult sexuality and gender were not fixed by nature but were constructed through a long and conflict-ridden process” (Connell, Masculinities 9). Indeed, one of the popular philosopher's hypothesis stated that humans were constitutionally bisexual, i.e., both men and women had masculine and feminine currents running in their blood, a claim supported by Connell’s research as well (9). While Freud focused on the repression of the feminine traits men could bear inside themselves, his contemporary and follower Carl Jung, devoted his efforts to the possible achievement of a balance between the masculine person and the
feminine anima, something which author Robert Bly has used as the main basis of his active fight against the rise of “soft men” (Masculinities 14).

1.3. Women vs. men's literature

Among the literature dealing with gender, such as Men Are Like Waffles Women Are Like Spaguetti by Bill and Pam Farrell, researchers reaffirm the constant narrative that aims to make us believe that our differences within the gender binary are so vast they require separate worlds. As far as the Farrells are concerned: “Men process life in boxes. If you look down at a waffle, you see a collection of boxes separated by walls. The boxes are separated from each other and make convenient holding places” (Farrel 11). Hence, according to these authors we should not initiate conversation with a man while he is watching football because being a “waffle” does not allow him to carry out any other task simultaneously.

Women process like a plate of pasta (...)This is why a woman is typically better at multitasking than a man. She can talk on the phone, prepare a meal, make a shopping list, work on the agenda for tomorrow’s business meeting, give instructions to her children as they are going out to play, and close the door with her foot without skipping a beat. (13)

Despite the Farrells’ delicious food metaphors, I must assert that having my mind compared to spaghetti does not clarify why many men cherish the belief that they are not able to multi-task. If we were still living in the era of Betty Friedan's Feminine Mystique these multitasking daily routines would probably still stand as
“fulfilling” and “necessary” to women’s roles as perfect housewives, but it is 2015 and things have developed in a different manner.

A woman who is an effective homemaker must know some something about teaching, interior decoration, cooking, dietetics, consumption, psychology, physiology, social relations, community resources, clothing, household equipment, housing, hygiene and a host of other things.... She is a general practitioner rather than a specialist...(Friedan 200)

However, and even though it is still rather arduous for a sector of society to assimilate, women have actually progressed, and the home is not women’s main headquarters anymore. Furthermore, men are finally starting to diversify their position in the household and if women maintain the attitude of behaving like “tangled noodles” men will not be able to achieve a complementary role.

Ironically, this type of “men-vs-women literature”, which would be subject of much derision in the 1970s, has acquired considerable success in terms of sales at present times. This is validated by the fact that more than 150,000 copies of the Farrells' book have been bought in eleven years, a figure eclipsed by the 50 million copies Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus author John Gray's personal website certifies has put in the market since its first publication in 1992 (Mars Venus). What is the real reason behind this astounding success in the 21st century? People’s desperate search for answers to any possible relationship dilemma, combined with the claim of certainty these supposedly scientific based works provide are the chief motives why these self-help books reap persistent sales. Psychologist
Cordelia Fine has named this practice, of providing pseudo-scientific reports to justify certain personality patterns, as “neurosexism” since it corresponds to very clear sexism concealed through neuroscience terms and facts.

Again and again, claims are made by so-called experts that are ‘simply coating old-fashioned stereotypes with a veneer of scientific credibility”(...). Yet, this 'popular neurosexism' easily finds its way into apparently scientific books and articles for the interested public, including parents and teachers”. (Fine, *Delusions of Gender xxviii*)

Gender biased as we have been raised, we do not always know how to behave when certain issues dealing with relationships, heterosexual ones “of course”, happen to emerge. What I strongly believe is that simple misunderstandings or different points of view do not find their origins in sex or gender differences but in unique different personalities instead. Notwithstanding, if a popular author is able to promise us relief from our unhappiness, many people will want the blueprint as fast as possible whether it is provided through a book, a seminar or an online course. Unfortunately, all these “magic formulae” still revolve around idea that men are superior to women, no matter how an author might attempt to hide it in nonsense euphemisms such as waffles or spaghetti. What is true, is that these so-called-dogmas are seriously harming not only women, who are often seeing the progress of the second feminist wave heroines thrown away; but men as well who, as a consequence, do not see the need to advance and come out of “their closets” or “straightjackets” as referred to by Kimmel.
What these theories tend to account is the way that masculinity is coerced and policed relentlessly by other guys. It it were biological, it would be as natural as breathing or blinking. In truth, the Guy code fits as comfortably as a straightjacket. (*Guyland* 51)

Sex roles continue to be transmitted from generation to generation as patterns of what is expected by society, which makes them a way of socialization misunderstood to be a natural process. A blatant example of this non-innate way of internalizing socialization or conventionalism may be illustrated through female circumcision. This ritual is carried out by mothers who suffered themselves the same gruesome pain in their youth—this creates a contradiction between the desire to spare one’s children the same pain and the cultural expectation and acceptance of the practice. Where are the limits to tradition? Should we allow society to establish them or should common sense dictate what is correct? Shouldn't we look further ahead and stop worrying so much about gender or sexuality? Why not consider race, class, ability, age, religion an any other social elements which may suppose a change in gender and sexuality? (Dinshaw 75). Regarding these thoughts Michael Kimmel supports Carolyn Dinshaw’s view in stating that “making gender visible does not mean making race, ethnicity, class, sexuality or age invisible” (*Debating* 17). Let us bring in a self-explanatory example. Why is there an Academic Award for best actress and a different one for best actor?\(^{12}\) The quality of any performer’s presentation is not subject to sex. Who grades the importance of various identity

---

\(^{12}\) What can't be ignored is that if the actress/actor distinction was not to be made it would probably be mostly men the ones who receive the prizes in this patriarchal society.
components? What is undeniable is that most people are absolutely convinced that gender does not only stand as a relevant characteristic but as a crucial attribute of our personality.

Gender certainty is so important to us. Without it, we feel as if we have lost our social bearings in the world, and are threatened with a kind of 'gender vertigo', in which the dualistic conceptions that we believe are the foundations or our social reality turn out to be more fluid than we believed or hoped. (Kimmel, *Gendered* 109)

1.4. The search for the limits between masculinities and femininities

Michael Kimmel argues that by pluralizing the masculinity and femininity terms we agree that both have a different meaning for different people at different times (*Gendered* 10). As a matter of fact, Kimmel introduces social constructionist perspectives on gender when he points out that definitions of masculinity and femininity vary from culture to culture, and even in a particular culture the meanings fluctuate depending on the historical period. What is more, different moments of a person's life will result in different gender connotations (*Gendered* 95), which corresponds to the fluidity of the term itself.

In order to introduce these two notions let us explore Figure 18, a photograph from the 2014 G8 Summit.  

---

13 The G8 summits are meetings between the leading nations of the world. The G8 was created in France in 1975, it formerly was G6 and G7 until Russia was added.
At a glance, somebody will probably catch our attention. Among the men in dark suits and blazers there is a solitary figure wearing light tones. This is Angela Merkel, the first woman elected as German Chancellor, whose political and personal accomplishments surely required incredible perseverance, not as the consequence of any personal shortcomings but due to all the barriers and pressures a patriarchal society is able to exert on women so as to prevent them from reaching any high societal position, the so called “glass-ceiling effect” (*Glass Ceiling* 2). It is still shocking that Merkel is the only woman in that picture regardless of it having been taken on the second decade of the 21st century. Another inquiring issue is whether that “tough masculine” look Angela Merkel displays, so continuously criticized by her opponents, is another strategy to be better accepted by her colleagues in a “man's world” or if it is simply her natural way of dressing and acting.
Hence, the issue is, would she be taken as serious if she presented a more “feminine” look? Does this imply that women have to sacrifice their “femininity” to find a place among men? And the other way around, do men have to lose their “masculinity” to enter “feminine” professions like teaching or nursing? Does femininity then only apply to women and masculinity to men? These questions may arise as slightly awkward or even leave many people bemused, unable to find any suitable answer. To help us out of this intricacy, Judith Halberstam does not only affirm that it is possible to study masculinity without men but that masculinity cannot be fully understood unless female masculinity is taken into account (qtd. in Adams 468). Regarding the man’s body, professor R.W. Connell also states that albeit masculinity tends to be aligned to male bodies it is not only determined by male biology. Hence, as she mentions, we may logically talk about masculine women or masculinity in women's lives, as well as masculinity in men's lives. What is more, Connell defines masculinities as “configurations of practice within gender relations, a structure that includes large-scale institutions and economic relations as well as face-to-face relationships and sexuality” (Men 29). Hereabouts the work of Wannamaker, alluding to some of Judith Butler and scholar Perry Nodelman’s words, may be highlighted in saying that there are many “complexities in being born into a body whose characteristics have already been defined for us” (28); a body which is indeed governed not only by gender but also by race or class among others.

The color of our skin, the length or width of our nose, or our genitalia are physical features which we have not chosen; this is how these authors overthrow the theory which postulates that children are blank slates. This tabula rasa concept,
originally presented by Locke or Rousseau in the late 17th and early 18th centuries and popularly updated by Steven Pinker in *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of the Human Nature* (2002). Stephen M. Whitehead adds that “masculinities are not a genetic combination or determined by a fixed, unchangeable, biological set of conditions or factors. There's not a Darwinian explanation for the state of gender relations” (10). We are not more or less masculine for having been born with a penis instead of a vagina, just as we are not more or less homosexual for behaving in a more or less feminine way. One may be born with a vagina, behave in a macho-masculine manner, practice homosexuality and be able to identify him/herself either as a man or a woman. The options are limitless, individual and unique just as any human being is, “those spaces, those moments where borders are being articulated through binaries are also sites where the abject appears as a threat because it challenges the fixity of the borders” (Wannamaker 28).

Recapitulating all the aforesaid statements; shouldn't we more reasonably pluralize and talk about masculinities and femininities as broader terms? Could anyone certainly compose a unique interpretation of what masculinities or femininities signify with certainty? We tend to acknowledge the occurrence of a unique type of masculinity defined as hegemonic masculinity and popularized by professor Raewyn Connell in 2005:

Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women. (*Masculinities* 77)
This variety of masculinity finds its core definition in heterosexual power and authority over women as well as over other types of subordinated masculinities, which include gays, or marginalized masculinities where we can find “sissies” or “nancy boys”. Indeed, the real range of masculinities spreads much farther. In *Men and The Boys* R.W. Connell remarks how, since we live in multicultural societies, there are multiple definitions and dynamics of masculinity, a diversity which does not stop at communities but may also be present in a given setting. As she puts it: “Within the one school, or workplace, or ethnic group, there will be different ways of enacting manhood, different ways of learning to be a man, different conceptions of the self and different ways of using the male body” (*The Men* 10).

John Stephens also mentions the existence of a diversity of masculinities in the preface of his work *Ways of Being Male*, in which he includes the traditional macho, the New Age man, the gay, and the queer (ix). In 2007 sociologist C. J. Pascoe conducted a very interesting study later to be described in her work *Dude, You're a Fag:Masculinity and Sexuality in High School* in which she closely examines the hegemonic masculinity reigning over the high school universe through the use of the fag epithet. The author also makes use of some of Connell's words to distinguish among different types of masculinities.

Complicit masculinity describes men who benefit from hegemonic masculinity but do not enact it; subordinated masculinity describes men who are oppressed by definitions of hegemonic masculinity, primarily gay men; marginalized masculinity describes men who may be positioned powerfully in terms of gender but not in terms of class or
Psychologist Linda Brannon highlights the fact that her field has not managed to measure masculinities or femininities in “theoretically meaningful and valid ways” yet (178). Hence, not only gender, but also femininities and masculinities are constructed entities.

Ultimately, if as many people think, masculinity were something natural, men would not feel the constant need to police themselves and other men (Wannamaker 128); an opinion clearly refuted by the observation of how diverse masculinity tests are carried out depending on the culture. David Gilmore in “Cultures of Masculinity” for instance, argues that “the acquisition of masculinity is a slow, gradual process. Therefore, societies provide some kind of testing for the boy to prove that he is a man, which turns out to be a 'deep psychological problem even nowadays” (33).

Consider, for example, all those cultures in which circumcision is a crucial rite to enter manhood, practiced as a way to separate the identification with the mother and proceed to evolve to “authentic” masculinity. The psychological explanation for these rites is rooted in Freud's “Oedipus Complex” presented in Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality. This is simply another path to assert male dominance and far from being “a trait carried on the Y chromosome; it is the outcome of the different cultural valuing of men's and women's experiences” (Kimmel, Gendered 3). On the other hand, female circumcision, also known as female genital mutilation, whether it is clitoridectomy, infibulation or any other practice, does not precisely connote female domination. Indeed, this type of castration, illegal and therefore condemned in many countries —among which we may find Spain (“Primera Sentencia”)— is a symbol of loss of sexual pleasure. This practice unrelated to the motives of male
castration actually implies another form of male domination. Both of these repulsive practices, from my point of view, are just compulsory societal tests to prove masculinity and men's power over women by many groups. As this present investigation has been carried out in the Western World there is, fortunately, not much chance of encountering these practices in our daily life. Notwithstanding, the social mechanism may be compared to the way Spanish university students humiliate newcomers. The motivation behind forcing them to drink vodka through funnels, stand as live ashtrays for the older students, or sleep under senior student's beds for whole nights is not much different than the scenarios described before (“Veteranos”).

![Figure 19: Image from article about hazing](image)

These types of deeds tend to be aggravated in the USA where college students “voluntarily” degrade and demean themselves in the interest of entering some kind of brotherhood. Michael Kimmel presents a striking study of these practices and their relation to masculinities in his work *Guyland*:

Still naked, the pledges stumble to the second-floor balcony of the house. The brothers measure out lengths of rope, and a
cinderblock is tied to the end of each, so that it almost-but not quite-touches the ground. The pledges are blindfolded as the other ends of the ropes are tied to the base of each pledge's penis. “You better have a big enough dick, pledge,” the pledgemaster shouts. “If your dick isn't big enough, you aren't getting into this house. This block is gonna rip it the fuck off your body! How do you like that, you little weenies? Our dicks made it! Is yours big enough? (97)

Most of these tremendously cruel tests pretend to be proofs of a search for the traditional macho-masculinity standard. Furthermore, there is a tendency for these practices to become more and more savage with the passage of time including some students' deaths among their consequences (Kimmel, Guyland 122). Michael Kimmel claims in Guyland that men are often willing to go through horrendous tests to show their masculinity simply to enter a brotherhood, which after all is no more than a bunch of men wanting to be friends for life till death do them part. As a matter of fact, isn't that the central idea of romantic love? More surprisingly; isn't that type of love considered as kind of “gay” in men? It is interesting how Kimmel proceeds to analyze certain “macho” practices such as American football or high school wrestling in his work Guyland. All those men having extremely close contact with one another or those notably tight wrestling outfits they wear actually emerge as kind of homosexual indications to the author. However, these men truly believe to actually be representing hegemonic masculinity at its highest level. Another sample of this “fake masculinity” could be personified in water polo players who embrace tightly and kiss one another on the cheeks whenever they score a goal despite being almost nude, facts which could be interpreted as gay in any other context. Thus,
where are the frontiers? Should we then have a “gay-macho” scale for defining men's practices? Fortunately, not only such type of hierarchy fails to exist but from the previously exhibited exemplifications we may be able to see how one concept easily overlaps the other.

As regards the scholarly world, masculinities should probably be included in gender studies; but this field, no matter its openness to new insights—queerness among others—is still largely a women's arena. Despite how logical this inclusion might appear, it is true that there remains a great deal to work in the women's field. The women/gender studies division provides women with more opportunities to obtain subsidies and investigate in this terrain, which up to a certain point justifies women's refusal to expand the research association. As a consequence, this engulfment of women studies into gender studies remains fearful for many women who as exposed by Segal see it as a possible counteraction on the side of patriarchs:

In Academia feminists worried that those who helped promote the theoretical shift from women’s studies to gender studies were encouraging men to occupy the institutional space they had fought so hard to create over two decades earlier. (135)

Michael Kimmel makes a further remark to the above declared statement by saying that it is not a question of opening another course ghetto to address gender, but that gender should be included in the main courses in which literature is discussed (Debating 29). Then, it is not just a definite feminist view in a particular work or certain masculinist approach of a concrete author. We must learn to use an
expansive gender lens to discuss any work of literature. Needless to say that this does not, of course, only apply to literature but to any other sphere in which gender applies as an issue of consideration.

We must not fail to recognize that we must approach gender in gendered institutions full of gendered people. There are not gendered-virgin beings with whom we may interact and as a consequence there are not really any other options about “whether to participate in the binary gender system [as] society's fierce gender pressures make the question of agency—even the tiniest actions—highly complex” (Rabinowitz 21). All of us have been gender-contaminated since our birth, or what is worse, before our birthday. Indeed journalist Annie Murphy Paul makes use of her book *Origins* to make us aware of what we may learn before we are even born. We used to think that learning began at the moment of delivery but according to Murphy Paul the acquisition of knowledge actually goes back five months before birth-time. Indeed, we all may witness how as soon as parents know the sex of the future baby they, and their surroundings, unconsciously behave in a different way depending on the sex, thus sending disparate signals to the baby.

1.5. Conclusion

All the previous exposed issues make me wonder what it is we wish for our children. Do we want a world ruled by a binary gender system in which their individuality will be denied? Do we want our children to believe they come either from Mars or Venus as John Gray wants us to believe? Aren’t there many other planets in the solar system and beyond? Dr. Michael Kimmel also used the outer
space metaphor to introduce “the interplanetary theory of gender”, which postulates that “the observed mean differences between women and men are decisive and that they come from the fact that men and women are biologically so physically different” (*Gendered* 14); a theory he is absolutely opposed to.

Whether it is from a feminist, masculinist or queer perspective the chief issue should be offering an open insight in which human beings feel free enough to be able to decide on their likes and dislikes, their wishes and their needs without any pressure from society. Kimberley Reynolds agrees with the previous statement in arguing that:

> As long as people are categorized using a crude and essentially binary system which sorts on the basis of sex and sexuality, the sense of the self as unknowable and unstable will continue to impede the formation and performance of identity. (110)

As writer Phyllis Burke claims in *Gender Shock* we must promote gender independence, that is “that the individual is not precluded from feeling or doing anything because of their body” (234). Burke is definitely postulating for further options beyond the binary such as transsexuality, which evidences how an individual is not stuck from birth to a specific gender.
CHAPTER 2. THE PROCESS OF REACHING ADULTHOOD FOR BOYS, ITS IMPLICATIONS AND CONSEQUENCES

2.1. A historical approach to the boy crisis

The beginning of the 20th century saw the rise of a crisis in boys' “manliness”. Journalists Caryl Rivers and Rosalind Chait Barnett remind us of this now forgotten first boy crisis in the following article script:

...young men were spending too much time in school with female teachers and that the constant interaction with women was robbing them of their manhood. In Congress, Sen. Albert Beveridge of Indiana railed against overeducation. He urged young men to 'avoid books and in fact avoid all artificial
learning, for the forefathers put America on the right path by learning completely from natural experience'. (The Washington Post)

As a matter of fact, initiatives such as “The Boy Scouts of America” movement, founded in 1910, were promoted at the time as strategies for bringing boys back to “manhood” after all those years of “emasculated schooling”14. Sociologist Michael Kimmel recalls this movement when he says; “Boys, in danger of feminization by female teachers, Sunday school teachers and mothers could troop off with the Boys Scouts, designed as a fin-de-siècle boys’ liberation movement” (“Boys and School” 19-20). It was the subsequent women's movements’ duty to strongly belittle these ideas about boys undergoing any type of identity crisis.

At the end of the 20th century, over eighty years after this first boy crisis, a new reactionary wave was initiated. Magazine covers, newspaper articles and education journals all began to discuss a new crisis developing in the masculine sphere. The issue now mainly addressed to boys failing at school, being irrationally violent, or attempting suicide at a high rate. Events such as the 1999 massacre at Columbine High School in Colorado made people more aware, albeit helpless, of the new crisis among boys. Where once girls had been the bearers of labels like, “weak, helpless and subject of society's abuse”, people began to realize boys could occupy this space as well. What kind of world would our boys be expecting at present? How would parents help their boys not to fall under depression, drugs or violence? What could teachers do to avoid a rise in gender bullying towards boys? This state of

14 In 1912 the Girl Scouts of America was also founded. Additionally, in 2014 the Boy Scouts Movement actively removed language prohibiting homosexual participation, action expanded to include adult participants as well in 2015. (“Membership Standards”).
affairs provoked a new wave in gender and education research, labeled as “the boy turn” by Marcus Weaver-Hightower (471). Attention seemed to be turning back to boys after girls having occupied the focus for many years. Yet, this shift ran the risk of being double edged, Weaver-Hightower argues, as it might be interpreted or performed as a turn away from girls on the one hand or as a chance for boys to be finally having a turn on the other (472). Weaver-Hightower affirms that the first point of view was embraced by feminists who perceived this move as a backlash against their vigorously gained position, whereas the second perspective corresponded more to “advocates for boys, antifeminist groups and some education researchers” (472) who were finally gaining validation on the boy's side. Notwithstanding, I do not recognize Weaver-Hightower's description of the second grouping as fully accurate due to its incongruity, since advocates for boys may be feminists as well, one thing not necessarily excluding the other. As an instance, I will cite doctor Michael Kimmel whose enthusiastic support for boys has always been accomplished from a feminist point of view. De facto, this current research can be described as founded on a feminist basis which intends to ensure boys a healthy educational livelihood as regards gender beliefs by using children's literature as a means.

The acknowledgement of the boy crisis resulted in a vast amount of literature which Weaver-Hightower classifies into four different streams. Firstly, he mentions popular-rhetorical literature, which argues that boys are in disadvantage mainly due to the feminization of their schooling period. Secondly, he cites theoretically-oriented literature which recognizes that several types of masculinities exist and
tracks their development in society. The third type is the one he names as practice-oriented literature, which focuses on performing interventions so as to improve the academic level of the boys. Finally, he concentrates on a critique of the boy turn, as corresponds to the feminist and pro-feminist responses.

Just as masculinity studies tended to be ramified in diverse wings, so was this boy crisis understood and contested in different ways. It was not only responsible for the birth of a whole new body of literature, but also parental advice seminars and men associations, which were founded with the aim of helping adults “cope with boys who are — depending on the expert— too masculine, too gay, too illiterate, too tied to biology, too much under the influence of feminism, too angry, too unemotional, and so on” (Wannamaker 123).

In summation: on one side, this boy crisis was described as a dangerous loss of manly behavior, toughness, power and courage, which will be referred to as the “boys are just boys” branch; on the other side, the boy crisis was perceived as a reaction to a lack of empathy with many boys who did not fit the “hegemonic masculinity” model. This second group of “deviants” was accordingly bullied at school while suffering from communal discrimination; in many cases being diagnosed with supposed “illnesses” such as non-gender conformity syndromes, gender identity disorders or androgen insensitivity syndromes among others. This other side will be referred to as the “boys are more than just boys” perspective. Michael Kimmel regards both options as belonging to the schools of thought which prevail nowadays, and which mainly correspond to biology determinism and differential socialization respectively (Gendered 2).
2.1.1. Analysis of the causes of the boy crisis

2.1.1.1. The postulation of boys maturation process as natural and innate related

The “boys are just boys” conviction is supported by different scholars such as Christina Hoff Sommers, whose work The War Against Boys: How Misguided Feminism is Harming Our Young Men analyzes boys' situation and tries to appeal to governments and schools in particular, so as to have them change the way education is being conducted. According to her, boys are the new “other”, being neglected, ignored, and downtrodden by powerful girls and their supportive feminist surroundings. As Weaver-Hightower affirms: “Sommers attributes such difficulties to distortions of fact by educational advocates for girls and attempts by feminists to "pathologize" the manly "nature" of boys” (473). I must express my disagreement with Sommers' convictions since I fully reject the idea that boys are born “manly”. It has been previously proven true in this same dissertation, that boys are not blank slates (see p. 68). Nonetheless, most of those brushstrokes we add to their already initiated personal canvas do thoroughly influence how their future personalities will be comprised. In fact, most of the children characterized as loving and affectionate are likely to have been raised in loving and affectionate surroundings; whereas children denied acts of caring such as hugs or kisses are less inclined to be kindhearted and tender in their future.

I also cannot fail to highlight how Sommers inscribes her theories in a binary world in which there exists no more than the men/women alternative with their corresponding masculine or feminine genders, and who observe heterosexuality as the only option. Hence, Christina Hoff Sommers may be accused of neglecting
transgenders, inter-sex people and all those non-gender conforming human beings who do not fit into her ubiquitous binary system and her “universal theories”. What cannot be denied is that Sommers has been as strongly criticized by her feminist colleagues as highly applauded by her scholarly supporters. Indeed, though Sommers does loudly and openly identify herself as a feminist it must be denoted that not many would include her as one. The following statement pronounced by Sommer condenses most of her spirit: "the paradox of egalitarian feminism" is that "when women are liberated from the domestic sphere...and no longer sequestered in the role of nurturer, many, perhaps most, persist in giving priority to the domestic sphere" to which journalist Sharon Presley responded: “Of course most women (and men) want families, but that doesn't mean they can't want careers too” (Presley).

Another scholar who defends the “boys are just boys” principle is Leonard Sax, psychologist and family physician. As far as he concerns, boys and girls are hardwired differently and our failing to recognize this hardwiring (Boys Adrift 24) may risk ruining their education. Why Gender Matters, one of Sax's most popular works, asserts that as girls and boys are born biologically different, so they deserve to be educated. This is the reason why Sax advocates single-sex education, as he believes boys and girls should be treated according to their sex. In fact, Leonard Sax is the founder of the NASSPE\(^\text{15}\) which came to light in 2002. Following new regulations in America which legalized single-sex education in 2005 we must admit that Sax's popularity did considerably increase. Yet, I am personally convinced that this type of education is regressive, especially after having taken so long to understand we have to learn to live as a community no matter our gender label. Even

\(^{15}\) NASSPE: It stands for National Association for Single-Sex Public Education.
President Barack Obama is at present working towards eliminating these practices as there is a lot of stereotype behavior hidden underneath. For instance, in some of these single-sex schools boys were being given quizzes about bikes, and girls about bracelets; or girls were encouraged to read love stories whereas boys were supposed to read books on hunting; or boys had more exercising time and were allowed to raise their voices in classes whereas girls had to be sitting quiet most of their time (Wheeler). This idea has also been expressed by experts such as Kimmel in affirming that “Single-sex education for men often perpetuates detrimental attitudes and stereotypes about women” (Misframing Men 182 ; “Boys and School” 39). Kimmel bases this argument on Epstein's ideas, who alleges that:

> segregated schooling for women limits their access to the same educational and associational opportunities men have

(…) It further argues that whatever the intent or ideological underpinning of such arguments, they ultimately have a negative outcome for women’s equality in society. (“The Myths” 101)

Truly, these types of adverse reactions diminish all the advances we, as a society, have made as regards co-education. Since single-sex education focuses on convincing us that we are so different as to deserve different tuition, guidance, or instruction the issue would be: where does the equality struggle stand as a result? It is true that single-sexed education may succeed in some circumstances; however, this success relies on maintaining traditional gender models —according to biological features— and we may have turned children into totally different beings from their true original personalities. We cannot deny that men and women are different, but so
are women and men among themselves. As a self-explanatory example of this, psychologist Cordelia Fine offers us an imaginary world in which children are differentiated from birth not because of their genitals but their right or left handedness ability (*Delusions of Gender* 210). In this fictitious cosmos, right-handers are dressed differently from left handers and even have their hair cut in a different way. Left-handers tend to become primary teachers, child care workers or kindergarten teachers whereas right-handers usually end up building sites or garbage trucks. This made-up universe which might seem so unreal, idiotic and insane for us, actually bears little difference from the world we live in, where gender is labeled in a similar way, whether it is by clothing, hairstyle, or accessories. This may prove how speaking about “hardwiring” in the second decade of the 21st century stands as a considerably outdated message. Nevertheless, as if it was a sect or some kind of drug, not only do we get addicted to “gender stereotyping”, but these values are continuously transmitted to the youngest generations by encouraging children to work unstoppably as “gender detectives” (Fine, *Delusions* 212) and cruelly identify any kind of “error” which does not fit the “correct” standards of gender they have been taught. Accordingly, any boy or girl who does not follow society's archetypes will be incessantly pointed out by their peers.

Leonard Sax's career as a physician leads him to determine five basely scientific factors leading to the decline of boys. These principles are identified on the cover of his popular yet criticized work *Boys Adrift*: 1. video games; 2. teaching methods; 3. prescription drugs; 4. endocrine disruptors and 5. the devaluation of masculinity. Regarding the fourth factor, which deals with endocrine disruptors, Sax
says: “Environmental estrogens from plastic bottles and food sources may be lowering boys’ testosterone levels, making their bones more brittle and throwing their endocrine systems out of whack” (*Boysadrift* website). Should we perhaps wonder about boys' tragic present situation being related to the overuse of plastic bottles? Professor R.W. Connell observes the relationship between science and gender in her work *Masculinities* stating that: “the appeal to science plunges us into circularity. For it has been shown, in convincing historical details that natural science itself has a gendered character”(6). Hence, once again it is difficult to promote equality in already gendered institutions (see p. 75).

Michael Gurian, family therapist and social philosopher, is another well-known advocate of this “boys are just boys” crusade. He has authored several works dealing with gender issues, among which we may find: *Wonder of Boys, Wonder of Girls* and his latest book co-written with Kathy Stevens in 2006 titled *The Minds of Boys: Saving Our Sons From Falling Behind in School and Life*. Just as the aforementioned Leonard Sax, Michael Gurian believes boys and girls are born naturally different and should consequently receive a different type of education. In addition, this author's recognition also comes from having founded *The Gurian Institute*, whose main objective is to provide training for teachers in how to help both boys and girls to reach their full potential by taking their inherently “different learning capacities” into consideration, separately of course. In fact, Gurian's work is greatly connected with how boys, due to their brain chemistry, require a considerably larger quantity of motivation and challenge than girls. To counter these beliefs it is advisable to notice how once more we are lumping all boys in the same sack in which

---

16 *Boysadrift* Website: www.boysadrift.com/factors.php
there is no room for those who do not follow traditional masculinity standards. Following the root of his theory I would affirm that girls who do share certain masculine characteristics should also be educated with these rather “boyish” boys; the result being that education works best when it is addressed to student's individual particularities and not to physical biological characteristics.

The fourth author to be incorporated under this flux of convictions is Warren Farrel who has lately become a significant spiritual leader in the USA. A professor and writer, Farrel is well-known for conducting multitude workshops and seminars dealing with the boys/men issue. He has also authored *The Myth of Male Power* and *Why Men Are the Way They Are*. In addition, Farrell is also Chair of the Commission to Create *A White House Council on Boys to Men*, whose aim focuses on helping Americans deal with the aforesaid boy crisis. The proposed council was rejected by President Obama in 2013 prompting Farrel to publish a response on his own web page titled “Obama's Missed Opportunity”. Personally, I doubt whether Farrell's means of managing this boy crisis are the most appropriate or accurate ones since, just as his colleagues, he also disregards gender non-conformity among boys. Hence, his *Council on Boys to Men* would not actually be aiding American boys as a whole, but only a particular segment of those who are cisgender themselves, i.e., boys whose gender matches the attitudes and roles traditionally understood corresponding to the masculine gender (see p. 35, 58).

Farrell is another promoter of single-sex education and is coauthoring at present a new book with John Gray, author of *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus* titled *Boys to Men*. As paradoxical as it may appear, there was a time when
Farrel not only declared himself as a feminist but went as far as supporting feminism on many issues. In fact, in 1974 he produced a widely popular text, *The Liberated Man*, which dealt with men supporting women in their fight, and did in fact acquire great popularity. However, Farrell has since shifted thought to being a masculinist not just in defense of boys, which may be declared magnificent as an aim, but to deny the power that men inherently hold just for having been assigned males at birth as he tries to prove in his book *The Myth of Male Power*.

I thereby may conclude that the above mentioned experts, who mainly converge on nature and biology as the principal causes for gender differences, seem dismissive of the socialization factor. By postulating these precepts, what these authors are actually conveying are messages such as; “For boys being antisocial might as well be socially acceptable” (Nodelman, “Making Boys Appear” 5) which are sadly dispatched as if universal scientific truths. On top of that, and as I have already stated, these followers of biologically deterministic theories show certain propensity to neglect any other gender option apart from the traditional binary, leaving many people out of their “methodical and rational” investigations.

Concerning evolutionary psychologists, academic and activist Lynne Segal evidences in *Men After Feminism* how these have also added their bit to this argument:

Evolutionary psychologists have been stressing that there really is a biological blueprint for fundamental, sexual difference, for men being more predatory and willing to spread their seeds and less committed to domesticity, and women being more cautious, nurturing, submissive and passive[...]. It's impossible not to see the rise of evolutionary
psychology, as in some ways often a type of backlash against feminism. (Epilogue 161)

An expert in evolutionary psychology and affirmed supporter of equity feminism, Barry X. Khule concludes that this type of psychology can perfectly coexist with feminism, or at least with equity feminism which he contrasts with gender feminism using C.H. Sommers' terms. While no expert on this type of psychology, my investigation has led me to believe that the differences between the sexes are neither one hundred percent nature nor nurture. As a result, I may embrace some evolutionary psychologist's postulates as possible, which does not imply we are thoroughly predisposed to a certain fate depending on our sex.

As an evolutionary psychologist, I believe that much light can be shed on psychology by considering how the information-processing mechanisms underlying our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors affected our ancestors’ abilities to survive and reproduce. [...] As an “equity feminist” (Sommers, 1994), I believe that women should have the full civil and social equalities that are afforded men. Equity feminism has no a priori stance on the origin or existence of differences between the sexes; it is solely a sociopolitical desire for men’s and women’s legal and social equality. Defined in these ways, there is no rational reason why one cannot be both an evolutionary psychologist and a feminist. (Khule)

2.1.1.2. The postulation of boys maturation process as a constructed and socialized concept

Let us now analyze the other wing, the “boys are more than just boys”
hypothesis. Since Dr. Sax as well as Michael Gurian incessantly base their findings on scientific facts, which at first sight make them appear much more accurate and convincing, I will begin the rebuttal by introducing neuroscientist Lise Eliot. Doctor Eliot firmly contributes to this debate with a variety of research, studies and data which are discernible in her work Pink Brain, Blue Brain. For a start, Eliot does not overlook biological facts such as the one which exposes that “the different hormones boys and girls are exposed to before birth can exert powerful effects on their later behavior” (4). These hormones, notwithstanding, cannot be considered as substances which will lead us to behave in a particular way and thoroughly define our destiny. Lise Eliot refers to “the nature stand” as well when she comments on the popular concern that boys' brains are bigger than girls and that girls' brains finish growing a couple of years earlier, that is, girls mature faster without having much consequence in their future. Nevertheless, according to Eliot, the real causal issue for many of the existent differences between the sexes is plasticity, which as she exposes, is responsible for how the physical features of our nervous system respond to life and are somehow modified to adapt to new experiences. Professor Anne Fausto Sterling also remarks on this mixture of nature and nurture saying that although infant boys are somehow considered more physically active than girls at first sight, which may immediately be regarded as an innate capacity, nurture does actually present a great influence too, fact which she has been able to reinforce through her investigation.

For example, there is a belief that boy infants are more physically active than girl infants. There have been studies that have shown this, but what we are doing [in our current
research] is analyzing videos taken under naturalistic conditions in the home. We are doing second by second analyses of what’s happening, of free play and free interaction between mother and child. The mothers are spontaneously, in the course of the daily events of care, moving the little boy infants more than they are moving the little girl infants – picking them up, helping them sit up, and touching them a lot more physically. The gender-differentiated pattern of behavior on the part of the mothers also becomes part of how the infants’ sensory systems develop. So the actual development of the motor and neuromuscular connections, the synapses, all of what you think of as biology is being influenced by behaviors that are differentiated according to culture. You can’t partition nature from nurture. They are a developmental unit. (Brazzell)

Another proponent of the nurture idea is psychologist Cordelia Fine, who affirms that the influence of those hormones we are exposed to work both ways, i.e. “stimuli in the environment … can trigger hormonal changes. Our hormones respond to the life we lead, breaking down the false division between internal biology and our environment” (Delusions 87). Fine also declares that “when researchers look for sex differences in the brain or in the mind, they are hunting a moving target. Both are in continuous interaction with the social context” (236). Hence, depending on the moment we are going through we will probably be exposed to different contexts, which will in turn conduct our neurones to make different connections resulting in diverse reactions or outcomes. Unfortunately, as professor J.S. Hyde affirms:

Contemporary gender research, mainly across the disciplines of psychology and sociology, has overturned many old views
of gendered behavior—traits (e.g., aggression), abilities (e.g., empathic accuracy), attitudes (e.g., sexual), interests (e.g., in science), and roles (e.g., caregiving)—as polarized and immutable. (qtd. in C. Fine, “His Brain, Her Brain?”)

Regardless the fact that it is during childhood when the brain seems to be more malleable, generally popular studies which stress the differences between men and women are carried out with adults, who, we must acknowledge, are already fully influenced by society norms, as Eliot smartly points out. As a matter of fact, it is true—Eliot says—that those studies which find differences are more likely to be published and talked about than those which confine to similarities. This tendency, appointed by her as the “file-drawer effect” (10), describes how often sensationalist results are the ones widely reported, leading to stereotyping and granting this effect more power than might be suspected. Furthermore, the population tends to unwisely absorb as true whatever is written in newspapers, broadcasted on T.V. or simply referred to in the media by famous people. Accordingly, “The more we parents hear about hard-wiring and biological programming, the less we bother tempering our pink or blue fantasies, and start attributing every skill or deficit to innate sex differences” (Eliot 14).

Psychologist Janet Hyde also discusses the file-drawer effect in her article “The Gender Similarities Hypothesis” claiming that:

Males and females are alike on most—but not all—psychological variables. Extensive evidence from meta-analyses of research on gender differences supports the gender similarities hypothesis. A few notable exceptions are
some motor behaviors (e.g., throwing distance) and some aspects of sexuality, which show large gender differences. Aggression shows a gender difference that is moderate in magnitude. It is time to consider the costs of overinflated claims of gender differences. Arguably, they cause harm in numerous realms, including women’s opportunities in the workplace, couple conflict and communication, and analyses of self-esteem problems among adolescents. Most important, these claims are not consistent with the scientific data. (590)

This is a side of the blue/pink universe we are not usually revealed, fact which led researcher and feminist ethnographer Maria do Mar Pereira to comment on the negative effects gender-stereotyping could have on our youth:

this constant effort to manage one’s everyday life in line with gender norms produces significant anxiety, insecurity, stress and low self-esteem for both boys and girls, and both for ‘popular’ young people and those who have lower status in school. (Culp-Ressler)

William Pollack, psychologist and assistant clinical professor at Harvard Medical School, believes the socialization factor is crucial in gender differences too. Pollack’s book Real Boys is the result of rigorous investigation into the modern boys’ crisis. Central to his work is what he deems the “boy code”; a series of “outdated and constricting assumptions, models and rules about boys that our society has used since the nineteenth century” (6). This “boy code” is so ingrained in boys' minds, and on everybody else's too, that children will not realize they are actually following such a set of principles until they happen to violate it, and that is exactly the moment when peers, relatives, or society will let boys know, and not usually in a subtle positive
way. William Pollack takes into consideration five steps for the community, parents and teachers, to be able to reach any boy who is hiding behind what he calls “the masculinity mask” (Real Boys, xxii). First, we must be aware of the first signs related to the concealing of emotions; second, we must learn a new way to engage with boys so as to get behind that artificial disguise; third, we have to accept their emotional schedule as they may not be ready to tell us everything right away. In fact, on many occasions boys will even need some “silence times” (Real Boys, 110-111), i.e., moments for deliberating and assimilating their own ideas and thoughts. Fourth, we should try to connect with the boy by joining some kind of activity he enjoys; and finally, we may help boys by sharing our own experiences with them, so that they may feel more comfortable by hearing that we ourselves have endured similar moments to their own. Most concerning about the tendency to adopt a “masculinity mask” is the motivation behind it. William Pollack appoints two primary causes: on the one hand, boys are constantly pushed towards shame for expressing their feelings, as society believes they must toughen up and become “real men”. In addition, boys are also forced to emotionally separate from their parents too soon, as opposed to girls who may remain under their mother and father’s protection and caring shield far longer. As a matter of fact, the “boys don't cry” or “momma's little boy” syndromes still persist nowadays as negative status quo; whereas the maxim “daddy's little girl” implies a positive feeling of love and care from a father to his daughter, and may be applied at any age —i.e., not only to little girls.

Paradoxically, boys are constantly being bombarded with confusing messages from the community. Let me further develop this idea; as we live in a supposedly
free, open, and integrated society, boys are expected to be sensitive and tender, just as many adult men have been able to become throughout the years. However, whenever boys express their feelings they are met with reproach, reinforcing elements of the “boy code”. As a consequence of our behavior, boys manifest a tendency to feel ambivalent and uncertain about their place in society. What is more dramatic, is that “many boys also believe that traditional notions of masculinity have changed as a result of feminism and not as a result of a reevaluation of male roles per se” (Johnston 144). Accordingly, many of these boys resolve to be silent and undergo the typical “emotional illiteracy” phase (Kimmel, “What about” 4; Kindlon and Thompson ix) in which they repress emotion and choose instead to hide behind the masculinity mask, where it by a great deal more difficult for help to reach. This artificially generated mask manifests in several ways, each displaying diverse emotions among which we may find: violence, misbehavior, bullying, or inability to relate to people; which result in drawing negative attention by means of continuous arguments, at school with detentions, etc. We should all feel responsible for the generation of these masks and their consequences. Kimmel confirms that “Sociologists have found that when bullying occurs in schools where gender dichotomies are pervasive in the classroom and in social hierarchies, it is comprised on direct attacks on masculinities not valued by the dominate peer culture” (Men and Masculinities 170).

After all these psychological considerations from Doctor Pollack, he advises on the unlearning of the “boy code” which he aims to accomplish by overthrowing myths and truths about boyhood such as; how diverse masculinity is, how
testosterone affects but does not direct boy's brains, or how boys are not socially
toxic beings and can actually be as empathic as girls. As regards the popular myth of
boys' natural aggressiveness professor Susan Lehr points out Kindlon and
Thompson's findings in their book *Raising Cain* which actually confirms how high
levels of testosterone are more effects of aggressive acts than direct causes of them
(Lehr 3) opposed to what most of us have always believed.

Although R.W. Connell has been widely mentioned in the previous chapter,
I personally consider she does truly deserve a place in this enumeration of
socialization theories too. Connell, professor at the University of Sidney, is known
worldwide for her theories on the social construction of masculinity. Her own
personal experience, having been born as a male and becoming a transsexual later in
life has guided her towards different approaches to masculinities which we can find
in her books *Masculinities* or *The Men and the Boys*. Connell posits in these two
books that physical inborn characteristics are not directly assigned to a specific
gender, as in her personal case. A great deal of her research is also linked to the
world of sexuality related to masculinities. As a matter of fact, Connell's new
condition as a woman does not match traditional sexuality terms either, since she is
homosexual.

Last but not least, I will again highlight sociologist Michael Kimmel as a
proponent of “boys are more than just boys”. Already introduced in the first chapter,
Kimmel belongs to the pro-feminist sector of the masculinist studies and his views
on the boy crisis topic I mostly share. In his article “Boys and School: a Background
Paper in the 'Boy Crisis’” Kimmel examines practically all the possible beliefs
concerning boys and their failure. For instance, he claims that “what holds boys back from succeeding at school is the persistence of those traditional ideologies of masculinity” (51). This sociologist's ideas are also reinforced by R. W. Conwell when she argues that schools hold an immense power in making and remaking gender; each school regime has a significant impact on the children's growing up as “it can set standards, pose questions and supply knowledge, for other spheres of life” (The Men 175). As far as schooling is concerned, Kimmel analyzes how, as previously exposed, some scholars argue that boys and girls learn differently due to brain chemistry, hormone secretion or other anatomical differences; whereas others affirm that it is not biology but the psychological and emotional stress boys and girls suffer from when they must perform in front of the other sex that makes them fail (“Boys and School” 18). Kimmel insists that the reasons boys are “abandoning ship” as a metaphor for leaving school, work or any project in general (28) has nothing to do with their abilities or capacity, but again with a false concept of masculinity; “To be successful in school is to be seen as not acting like a real boy” (28-29). Boys perceive school and everything involved with it such as reading, studying or writing as “feminized” and feel they must adhere to Pollack's “boy code” in order not to be left out. It is through peer culture that students learn and absorb “appropriate” gender behavior. “Peers establish the rules, and enforce them —constantly, relentlessly, and mercilessly” (29). Accordingly, boys do not wish to be seen as studious, hardworking or smart.

We should never neglect all those boys who are sensitive, who like literature, who are creative, musical, artistic. Will they find a place in a boys school
with a curriculum addressed to a unique hegemonic kind of masculinity? The answer is no, which does not prevent a whole community from performing “gender-policing” on boys, that will not let them develop as free human beings but will focus instead on limiting their options according to a set of nonsense socialized dictated standards.

In 2014 John Quiñones, presenter for the BBC’s “What Would You Do?”, conducted a social experiment during Halloween season at a chain store. In it, actors portrayed a mother and a son caught in a polemic dialogue. The son wishes insistently to wear a princess dress as his Halloween costume while the mother actively resists. The video focuses on detailing the reactions of some shoppers who engage with the mother to support or contradict her on the decision. The same performance is afterwards reversed changing the boy for a girl who, in this case, wants to wear a Spiderman suit. The customers are eventually questioned by the T.V. presenter who explains the experiment and inquires the reasons for having supported or denied the child’s wishes. In the case of the boy, the mothers interviewed were afraid of him being stigmatized, whereas in the case of the girls a couple actually ended up supporting the girl and even trying to convince her mother to purchase the costume. This experiment proves once more how although we have been able to move slightly ahead as regards girls, our boys still seem to be treated as if they were in the Victorian era.

2.1.1.3. Girls as main generators of the boy crisis

In 2008 the AAUW\textsuperscript{17} published a report called “Where the Girls Are: The

\textsuperscript{17}AAUW stands for American Association of University Women. This association’s aim is equity
Facts About Equity in Education” which concluded that there exists no such a boy crisis, or at least that the fact that girls are doing better than before does not have to necessarily imply boys are doing worse:

Educational achievement is not a zero-sum game, in which a gain for one group results in a corresponding loss for the other. If girls’ success comes at the expense of boys, one would expect to see boys’ scores decline as girls’ scores rise, but this has not been the case. (2)

According to this report the largest disparities are not between sexes, but among races, ethnicities and income levels. Most of the studies which corroborate the fact that boys are failing at school do not contemplate race, social class, or other elements which make boys' situations much more serious in terms of failure. For example, it has been proven that boys from suburban areas often fall outside the category of underperformers and do continue their studies at college. Professor and author Wannamaker argues as regard this theme that if there is a real boy crisis it is among rural and inner-city boys (Boys in Children's Literature 7).

2.2. Theories on gender, boys and their maturation

From the beginning boys enter a world in which they are expected to constantly prove their manhood and their heterosexuality. This fact is validated in the way Kimmel denounces the widespread use of the expression “that's so gay” to designate repulsive, abhorrent, or disgusting issues. What is more, this saying has become so generalized that it has actually lost all connotation to sexuality, and for both girls and women through education, advocacy, philanthropy and research.
through its use we are actually equating homosexuality with something highly offensive. Following this thread of thought Kimmel quotes professor David Leverenz in saying that “the word 'faggot' has nothing to do with homosexual experience or even with fears of homosexuals” (“Masculinity as Homophobia” 131). Kimmel affirms that “homophobia is the fear that other men will unmask us, emasculate us, reveal to us and the world that we do not measure up, that we are no real men” (131).

We must admit that it is much easier blaming nature than worrying about what it is we are doing wrong; and the danger remains, as “by age seven and perhaps as early as age four, children begin to understand gender as a basic component of self” (Taylor 301). On account of the fact that these children are so young we cannot but presume it must be natural for girls to like dolls and for boys to want to play with trucks. However, if there was a record of all the times we have unconsciously gender-raised our children, we would feel thoroughly ashamed. From the very first day a baby is born all kinds of gifts; clothes, toys, books, etc, are addressed to her or his sex. The way parents interact with their babies, even while in gestation, is really different depending on the baby's sex.

In July 2015, parents Ross Ball and James Millar published The Gender Police: A Diary, work in which this couple tried to compile all those situations or details which proved how their children were being raised differently by society according to their sex. These daily testimonies prove how things are not as innate, natural, and obvious as may seem. Here below you may find an excerpt from this fabulous book:

14th January 2011

Today we had visitors. Our daughter wanted to wear a
bridesmaid's dress she had worn for a friend's wedding. She said she wanted to wear her dress because the visitors “will like me”. She was right I suppose. A girl in a frilly dress gets a lot of, “Don't you look lovely in your pretty dress!” etc. She obviously associates people appreciating her appearance with being liked. There isn't much discussion from visitors about what our boy is wearing or how pretty he looks. (n.p.)

It is also undeniable, as Lynne Segal argues in the last chapter of *Debating Masculinities*, that “whether we emerge as tomboy girls or gentle boys, our story begins as a gendered story” (167). Most simply put, our physical features together with society's norms actually dictate how we will behave in the future.

### 2.2.1. Cognitive developmental theory

Psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg developed the cognitive-developmental theory between 1966 and 1969, an approach which somehow extended Piaget's theory of moral development, and which relates child's gender cognition to her or his maturation. Kohlberg describes three different stages that the child goes through during such a process. First, from their birth until the age of three is the gender-identity phase in which the subjects realize there are males and females and are even able to recognize themselves as one of them. The second stage, which goes from 4 to 5 years of age, is the gender-stability phase in which they understand that gender is fixed. The final stage, referred to as the gender-constancy stage, takes place from 6 years old onwards; it corresponds to the phase when children realize that gender is fixed no matter the behavior or look of a person (Kimmel, *Gendered 79*).

Fortunately, we are now able to affirm things are not so rigid and that gender,
as a term, is actually a constructed concept. Neuroscientist Lise Eliot accounts for some very interesting experiments carried out with babies in her book *Pink Brain, Blue Brain* to prove one more time how gender is no more than a made-up belief. In some of these tests babies were intentionally dressed in neutral colors so that adults could be mislead as a consequence of their wrong naming; i.e., a few baby girls were given masculine names whereas feminine names had been granted to some baby boys. Incredibly, the baby girls named as boys were more often described as angry or distressed by adults who did not know the truth than by adults who were aware of their real sex. Alternatively, in the group of boys named as girls the outcome was very similar. The supposedly baby girls, i.e., the real boys, were said to be more joyful and interested by mislead adults than by those who knew they were actually boys (Eliot 84). These tests show the truth of Eliot's words: “cross-dressing experiments have proven that the differences are less real than they appear in the eye of the beholder” (84). Let me include hereabouts a paragraph from an exceptional book titled *X: a Fabulous Child Story* written in the 1970s by Lois Gould, which will definitely give us some food for thought:

> When the Joneses said, "It's an X!" nobody knew what to say. They couldn't say, "Look at her cute little dimples!" On the other hand, they couldn't say, "Look at his husky little biceps!" And they didn't feel right about saying just plain "kitchy-coo". The relatives all felt embarrassed about having an X in the family. "People will think there's something wrong with it!" they whispered. (n.p.)
2.2.2. Gender identity in children growing as boys

If we were smart enough so as to accept gender as a construct and not as something natural, children would be able to choose their likes, dislikes, wishes, etc. without having to fit into one gender or another. What is more, transgender children, i.e., children who are born biologically as boys but identify as girls or vice versa, would feel no need to hide from society because of their “different” condition. There are many children—a lot more than we think as they usually stay concealed due to shame or fear—that after being assigned a gender at birth simply based on their genitalia, feel awkward with the assignation. Thanks in part to social media these children are now starting to come out of their closet, because for the first time in many decades a great deal of parents are supporting their children for who they are, no matter what their biological or physical features say. Many of these families are even assembling at gatherings where they can share their feelings and meet other families who live under the same circumstances (Alexus 309); and some feel brave enough to come out publicly, whether on T.V., through social media, or by writing about it. Journalists Alan Goldberg and Joneil Adriano remark:

But for some children, what's between their legs doesn't match what's between their ears -- they insist they were born into the wrong body. They are transgender children, diagnosed with gender identity disorder, and their parents insist this not a phase. (“I'm a Girl”)

One of these examples is Lori Duron and her child. Duron is a consultant who involuntarily had to face raising a gender non-conforming child. The way she learnt
to deal with this issue has been put into words in her work *Raising my Rainbow*, widely acclaimed in the USA. Other recent examples could be Jazz Jennings who is now 14, and has always felt as having been born into the wrong body; situation which led her to write *I am Jazz*, a book in which she explains what she has been through with the hope that it will help children in similar situations. Regrettably, there are still many children who suffer constantly throughout their lives and are made to feel as outcasts not being able to show their real selves:

Oh, if you were a little boy,
And I was a little girl--
Why you would have some whiskers grow
And then my hair would curl.
Ah! If I could have whiskers grow,
I'd let you have my curls;
But what's the use of wishing it--
Boys never can be girls
(Kate Greenaway, "Wishes")

In Spain the transgender community was first visualized thanks to the association *Chrysallis* in Andalucia, and 2015 saw the formation of *Arelas*, the first association for transgenders in Galicia managed by Cristina Palacios, a mother of a transgender child.

2.2.3. Gender expression in children maturing as boys

There is evidence that contrary to popular belief, newborn boys are much more emotional than girls, a true biological differences which comes to be denied. Nonetheless, it is us parents, teachers, and peers, who steadily reinforce in boys the
need to avoid expressing their feelings, no matter how dangerously counterproductive this actually is for their development. As Eliot states, “the constant pressure from peers and society to suppress their sadness, shame and frustration can become an emotional straitjacket that threatens their mental health and ability to connect with others” (255). This peer-pressure frame has also been outlined by Kimmel on “Boys and School: A Background Paper in the 'Boy Crisis' ” when he says: “It’s through peer culture that students learn appropriate gender behavior. Peers establish the rules, and enforce them – constantly, relentlessly, and mercilessly” (29).

Psychologist Linda Brannon cites Meehan and Janik in saying that there exists a cognitive process named the “illusory correlation” that allows children to maintain stereotypes once they have been formed (qtd. in Brannon 164). Even if children reject the “illusory correlation”, and naturally proceed to fight certain stereotypes, they face further challenges. Brannon also calls attention to the “stereotype threat”18 concept, which makes reference to how people “feel threatened in situations in which they believe that their performance will identify them as examples of their group’s negative stereotype” (159). This phenomenon lends to the explanation why girls often do worse at maths or technology in many cases whereas more boys excel at them. These differences intrinsically correlate with society's expectations, as people presume girls to be more hardworking —although paradoxically they culminate earning less and getting worse posts—, boys to be lazier, girls to be sweeter, boys to be more aggressive, etc. As time passes and these types of beliefs positively evolve, more girls are entering technical careers to prove

18 “Stereotype threat” was first studied by Claude Stelle and Joshua Aronson in 1995 through the performance of several tests which came to demonstrate that this threat tends to enfeeble one's performance.
how their capacity is no lower than boys'. Women are entering these formerly restrictive fields, whereas it is often men—and by men I certainly mean “hegemonic-masculinity” representatives—the ones who are unfairly given superior positions. This is the reason why girls' coding clubs have been set up so as to encourage girls to enter this “masculine” domain too. Projects such as Goldieblox, see chapter 1, are trying to modify this trend, but as I have already declared they are not entirely on the pertinent path as their toys should be addressed to all kinds of children, not just girls.

Let us not forget how we, adults, are children's most important social role models. This is well supported by evidence of social mimicry that confirms how boys tend to speak in a lower pitch than girls even before their vocal apparatus forces them to, which usually happens at preadolescence (Eliot 192). It is this social mimicry that may put boys at their highest in terms of success or at their lowest if they happen to fall out of the traditional masculinity circle. Toys which imitate adults may work as role models too. As anecdotal evidence back in 1992 a new model of Barbie doll which could actually “talk” was released. Lamentably, her maxims were not exactly brilliant: “Math class is tough”, “Let's go shopping”, and “Will we ever have enough clothes?” (Eliot 236). This kind of maneuver is evidence of how the media and toy companies are not only harming girls—and I allude only to girls, since this type of toys is aggressively marketed towards them—by doing certain style of campaigns, or marketing a particular type of product; but they are also teaching our boys about a false superiority over girls. Let us refer to toys once more but in this case to those who are specifically addressed to boys such as action figures.
This kind of toy has always been characterized as strong and muscular. Nonetheless, this tendency has lately been taken to its extremes in an unhealthy way. Similarly to how certain dolls may bear an indirect correlation in making girls become anorexic or bulimic with unrealistic body imagery; so too will these giant-like muscular toys influence boys on urging them to pursue body measures which are equally unrealistic.

These differences in strength, power, mobility, and size as regards toys will teach boys that they are placed much higher up in the societal scale; and once these feelings of supremacy are not fulfilled boys tend to fall into silence and depression, and develop inferiority complexes. As innocent as these details may seem if
individually analyzed, continuous messages of unobtainable bravado might also easily lead to gender violence in the near future (Kimmel, “What about” 2). Thomas Newkirk, professor at the University of New Hampshire, supports the idea that there exists an astonishing resistance to remake boys by creating “liberal utopias in which competition, violence and aggression” will be banished for instance (23). Certainly boys are worse at relationships than girls, after all, aren't we admonishing them whenever they cry or show their emotions in any way? The 1980s band The Cure confirms in the following excerpt from one of their songs how being a boy is sometimes not only difficult, but unnatural as well:

I try to laugh about it
Cover it all up with lies
I try and laugh about it
Hiding the tears in my eyes
Because boys don't cry
Boys don't cry (The Cure)

Despite being positioned under men in the social scale I feel fortunate in the way society will at least not reprimand me for showing emotion, since I am supposed to be entitled to it having been born a “woman”. Doesn't this sound as if we were doing something wrong ? As Eliot argues, “Girls should be praised as much for their strength as for their beauty, boys as much for their tenderness as their ball-handling activities” (102). Accordingly, the issue should not be a pink-princess-cosmos-hecatomb for girls and another blue-heroes-cosmos-hecatomb for boys, but a much wider world of possibilities for all children that is not limited by sex, gender, or sexuality. What may be inferred from such conjectures? Probably that there is still a
long way for boys to be able to enjoy all those spheres considered as not masculine without being appointed as detrimental to them by society.

It is nonetheless amusing how as gender expression evolves through the passage of time, so our understanding of what is unmanly, girlish, or effeminate tends to be modified too. By way of illustration the 1980s brought us very tight clothes for boys and men in fashion, sometimes even sparkly, of many different shades —pink a must—, along with transparent clothes, make-up, etc, i.e., everything which may nowadays clearly be related to the “feminine sphere”. See below a couple of images reproducing the “masculinity” of that era.

These photographs, which represent very popular male icons of those times, confirm our belief in the construction and fluidity of masculinity. Accordingly, not performing the appropriate masculinity of your time may result in severe complications. Thus, many parents think they are in need of a solution for this “masculinity crisis” their boys seem to have fallen under. What would the solution be? Getting them a copy of Con and Hal Iggulden’s *The Dangerous Book for Boys*?
Surely this was and still is contemplated by many parents as a “smart” decision, which is why the book became a bestseller the minute it was published in 2006. I would say that the most magnificent part of this work is that its aim is getting boys away from video games and T.V. by encouraging fathers—no mothers allowed—to spend time with their boys, doing the kind of manual pass-times they did with their fathers as children. However, we should inquire whether this apparent success relies upon the book's contents or on the efforts dads would be making to spend time with their sons, which is what children are lacking more than building wooden castles or using tool toys in the internet era. On top of this, we generally have the urge to provide our children with the kind of things we used to love when we were kids; but the truth is that no matter how much we loved The Smurfs or The Flinnstones, this does not imply 21st century children will love these cartoons too. However, we will probably purchase them for our children anyway, something which marketing executives are aware of, this being the second reason why a book such as The Dangerous Book for Boys sold over half a million copies in just a year (Lea). Though, aren't these kinds of books reinforcing the old macho type of masculinity once again? Aren't we gender stereotyping our sons by providing them with such readings? What about our daughters? Will we ever be able to get them away from the pink universe following this model? The Daring Book for Girls, follow up to The Dangerous Book for Boys, may be described as containing more up to date suggestions. In it girls are taught to carry out many different kind of activities, some of which would have probably been considered more appropriate for boys in the past; but as nowadays we want our girls to have as many opportunities as possible, there
seems to be no complaint whatsoever. Consequently, this second book should be safe and sound for both boys and girls, but our unconsciously built patriarchal axioms tell us it is not that way; thus, boys are not awarded any space here. It is also quite thought-provoking how the sequel of this popular book, the *Double-Daring Book for Girls*, has already fallen under the “pinkification” marketing strategy, which situates the book as even farther from the boy's world.

### 2.2.4. Sexuality in children maturing as boys

Recently deceased Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick denotes that we, believing ourselves as modern, trendy, and chic citizens, have learned to “accept” homosexuality in adults. Nonetheless, there is a tiny pitfall when it is young boys who are involved. Kosofsky is right when she declares that there is no book on teaching parents how to raise a queer child, as a matter fact such a work would be considered as scandalous by the most developed society:

...where are the discourses that not only treat queer youth as non-pathological, but also, and perhaps more important, that actively *affirm* queer youth, that deliberately and imaginatively seek ways to *grow* queer youth, to make it possible for more and more queer kids to emerge and to thrive? Where are the books, studies, schools, and psychiatrists who offer good advice to parents on how to bring their kids up gay, to *ensure* that proto-gay kids grow up queer? (Clark, n. p.)

On the contrary, we must come to terms with the fact that not only there exist no books on how to raise homosexual children but that heterosexuality is so
taken for granted in our society that almost every book exudes this choice as the only
commonly approved one. As a matter of fact, many books which try to introduce
further options as regards sexuality never seem to reach the market, as publishers
often deny their approval on grounds of “morality” or limited audiences. Often, the
reason this type of book registers low sales has to do with parents feeling
uncomfortable or wrong about buying them. On top of that, educational institutions
are not always allowed to purchase them either, due to parents' pressure or principal's
orders. This dilemma will only be overcome if adults are properly educated on
gender and humanity issues.

Another interesting subject to be discussed is the connection which exists
between children's literature and sexuality. Nodelman affirms:

In children's literature gender is at least theoretically
divorced from sexuality, and boys must be boyish and girls
girlish for reasons that have nothing to do with the
underlying reasons that there are gender categories at all.
The focus on gender implies a hidden awareness of children
as at least potentially sexual beings and suggests that the
possibility that sexuality is at least part of the sublimated,
hidden adult content of children's literature. (The Hidden
Adult 176)

It is interesting to validate how this “apparent divorce” signaled by Nodelman
is not as transparent in real life. We tend to associate certain gestures, likes or
attitudes not only to certain sex or gender but to a specific sexuality as well. Thus if
a boy likes pink, tiaras or princesses, we instantly identify him as gay, no matter his
age — needless to say being gay is not considered a plus on anybody's curriculum at
present times. Beyond all this, the mere possibility of growing up into a non-heterosexual being threatens people to such an extent that it is more and more often we encounter cases such as the one of five-year-old Romeo from Rugby, Warwickshire in England, who as reported by *The Daily Mail* was banned from playing with his church playgroup because he enjoyed wearing dresses. Even though his mother stated that Romeo had three older sisters whom he loved and that the cross-dressing was just an imitation of his sisters likes, the fact still seemed to be greatly disturbing for many people (Kirkova). Even an adult man who does not adhere to the necessary trends required to be considered as a “real man” will fall under “gay suspicion”, as if a kind of illness. Whether a man appears to present just one single “feminine” characteristic —such as doing the housework or minding the children— or many, he will be in any case regarded as “kind of gay”. Furthermore, reading is presented as responsible for spreading this “gay-disease” too, and any queer character in a book will be holding this “danger” label on its forehead, fact which will prevent many parents and school institutions from fitting these “menacing” books on their shelves.

As an example of this type of sometimes “banned” books, we may reflect on *My Princess Boy* —which will also be resumed in the fourth chapter— written by Cheryl Kylodavis, and whose protagonist is the author's own son. Despite having been born as a boy Dyson seems to adore all sort of “feminine” things. Indeed, his mother resolved to write this book mainly for it to function as a tool with which to educate the public about the main character's alter-ego community, and impress on them values of tolerance and respect towards him or any other boy undergoing the
same situation. This book gained widespread sales and recognition while helping revolutionize gender beliefs as a result of its dissemination via T.V. and the internet sources in the USA. However, many similar texts are ignored or dismissed by publishing houses; indeed, authors such as Lawrence Schimel often comment on how difficult it is to break the barrier of “normality” in trying to publish some of his books. Schimel's works tend to present characters or situations which, although atypical, do occur in our society. The cited writer's aim is to provide these characters a “voice” in a world in which although they do exist, are sometimes not given their deserved status. Some examples of this process of “voicing the other” can be found in a couple of Schimel's latest works. In *Just Like you*, he tells the story of a boy who feels different from his family because all of them wear glasses except for him, being anecdotal the fact that he is black and adopted; or *Flying Kites* dealing with a boy's visit to his aunt who happens to suffer from HIV.

Regardless of the previous beliefs we cannot deny that it is comprehensible to presume that by challenging gender roles we are actually inviting chaos, because we definitely are. Notwithstanding, we cannot forget that this restlessness and turmoil did also take place at those times when some people decided to support the abolition of slavery, to allow suffrage for black people, or to entitle women to work. Thankfully, chaos in this type of environment is temporary, whereas profitable in the long run, since once the calm reigns again it is unmistakably visible the way in which people have advanced towards a more free and tolerant society.

As psychologist Linda Brannon affirms it is true that children need categories to feel comfortable due to their cognitive processes; but if adults do not require them,
why do they maintain such outdated views? (184). Perhaps, as Herzog mentions, this is due to the fact that not having clear-cut categories forces us to question our identities. Such reflection involves both thinking and taking decisions about oneself, which in the short run is much more complicated than adjusting to the rest of the world:

Gender deviance can be especially terrifying not simply because it is frightening to see a boy dressed as a girl, but because seeing such a boy actually forces us to look at ourselves and question our own identities. In other words, gender non-conformity destabilizes the very categories upon which society and personal identity is built. (62)

2.3. Current practices to abolish gender stereotypes

2.3.1. Possible changes to be carried out through education

What should our position as educators or parents be? The message we probably think as the most reasonable to transmit to our children is that they should just be their true selves. Nonetheless, if that “real self” is released and it happens not to conform to social standards we then tend to stop encouraging them to be those “real selves” so as to become what we and society expect them to be, since we want neither them —nor us— to be stigmatized. Transgender advocate and blogger Erica Mays has her say about this:

Here’s an idea: Let’s stop teaching our kids that although we say it’s important to ‘be yourself’, they actually need to pretty-much be just like everyone else so they fit in. Let’s stop teaching our kids to hide who they are from the world
so they have a chance to grow into emotionally healthy adults. Let’s stop teaching our kids that it is OK to ridicule other kids who are different in some way. Last but not least, let’s get out of the chair, turn off the TV, put down the smartphone, and spend some face-time showing our kids how to be a positive force in the world, and do it by example. (“The Story of the Boy”)

Another constant fear of parents whose children are described as non gender-conformity is that their behavior will lead them towards homosexuality in the future. Notwithstanding, there are no studies which may verify the correlation of certain attitudes or behaviors with a particular sexual orientation. Charles Butler cites Eve Kosofsky to explain that in her article “How to Bring Your Kids up Gay” she “has shown that the taboos on unconventional gender imposed on boys are deeply heteronormative in character, with adults who disapprove of feminine behavior, often citing a fear that it is an indicator of homosexuality” (qtd. in “Experimental Girls” 14). We have fortunately learnt to accept girls who behave as “tomboys”, that is, girls who openly present some “masculine” manners, without people having any fear that these girls will become lesbians in the future. Nonetheless, how do we react when it is boys who act in a feminine way? In this still deep patriarchal society girls may sadly gain status by behaving in a male way; on the other hand, we cannot say the same when boys behave in an effeminate way. Even the slightest degree of femininity will be regarded as losing prestige, supremacy, or even talent. As Lise Eliot points out, this is one of the reasons why the following statement proves true: “when a boy does exhibit many girl-typical behaviors, he is about six times likelier to be sent to a psychiatrist than a girl with a comparable degree of masculinity
behaviors” (114). However, it has been proven that boys who were psychologically treated for their “disorder” of behaving somehow effeminate had not more chances of becoming gay in the future than boys who were just left alone (Eliot 115). In “Making Boys Appear” Professor Emeritus Perry Nodelman asseverates the easiness “with which many students perceive assumptions about femininity when they imagine a female character as a male and the difficulty of perceiving the parallel assumptions about masculinity when they imagine a male character as a female” (3). Because this other side is not being questioned, gender remains invisible in men and whenever it manifests we do not know how to react.

2.3.2. Successful campaigns against gendermarketing

What should really be of concern is why society is so thoroughly engaged in maintaining outdated illogical gender stereotypes to the extent of harming our children. Regrettably, the world is nowadays truly designed for a rigid binary model which will not be easy to erase. There are a great number of defenders for this unfair bilateral world and consequently any campaign to counteract these beliefs becomes laborious and in many cases unrewarded. After all, as Lise Eliot points out, “In today's hyper marketed world, what niche is easier to exploit than male or female” (15). Luckily, we do have a few examples of how one person effort can sometimes make a difference. The Christmas season of 2011 became an important date for blogger Dr. Laura Nelson. Thanks to her blog, Delilah, and what she reported on it as regards toys marketing strategies at Hamley's toy shop in London, one more step was given towards equality (Dr. Laura Nelson). As Laura did not understand the need for
a specific floor to allocate boys' toys and another one for girls' toys she confronted the toyshop. Should boys not be allowed to buy on the girls' floor if they wished so? What if they liked those other kinds of toys? How would then these boys be categorized? As Sissies? Gays? Queer? Should there be another sign for the “unmentionable youngsters”? The relevant issue is that the store did eventually change the signage and the contents of the toy shelves as a consequence of Dr. Nelson's public announcement; but what we will never know is if this action was carried out due to pressure from the government in charge of censuring such gender stereotyped scenario, or if they really understood the lesson Laura Nelson was trying to share. I personally think such celerity was more related to the former than to the latter reason, and even then it is likely to have been more of a political maneuvering and less of a morally conscious decision; nevertheless the result was positive.

Another campaign to be highlighted in the gender stereotypes battle is that of LetToysBeToys, founded in the UK, and which has lately acquired worldwide recognition for their successes. This foundation's primary goals are denouncing all those gender stereotypes which exist in the toy's world while inviting the public to do the same by sharing through the social networks whatever unfair situation they come across related to toys and gender. Although having initiated their cause as recently as 2013 I am proud to say that their achievements have been of great importance and notoriety as many stores have actually modified their way of retailing and choosing toys. What is more, several toy companies have felt obliged to adjust or even stop producing certain items on the grounds of their gender stereotyping portrait.

Following LetToysBeToys' example new campaigns have readily adhered to
the same cause, e.g., *LetClothesBeClothes* or *LetBooksBeBooks* among others. As a matter of fact, this last detailed campaign will be of great help in my personal engagement to abolish boy's gender stereotypes in children's literature. The increasing popularity of these movements clearly exposes how it is not only toys, books or clothes, which are in need of an exhaustive “restyling”, but also we people.

In *Pink Brain, Blue Brain* Dr. Lise Eliot signals several interesting experiments carried out with gender-traditional families on the one hand, and more egalitarian families on the other, the results being that children brought up on the second types of families tended to exhibit less stereotypical behaviors (136). Certainly, if a boy never sees his father cooking, cleaning or taking care of the babies, will he ever want to play with a toy-kitchen or a doll? Probably not, as his “role male model” —in this society in which gender still stands as crucial— does not do it why would he. Unfortunately, such a denial makes boys unconsciously miss many chances that would help them grow up as well-rounded children, just as Eliot's words affirm:

> There's a lot to be gained from playing with dolls or attending to babies. Doll play and pretend parenting reinforce social-emotional skills: caring for other people, considering and accommodating their needs... Playing house or family involves lots of verbal and communication practice, even if the child is playing by him- or herself. (130)
2.4. Conclusion

After all this brainstorming of opposed thoughts, ideas, beliefs and theories I have to admit we are still not walking in the right direction. Being a teacher and a mother myself, I see it crystal clear. I want both my son and daughter to have a deck full of opportunities from which to choose; I want my nieces to be tomboys if they wish, and I want my pupils to be able to choose from the “menu” instead of being forced upon a unique dish in their lives. Who wouldn’t agree that this way of being raised will provide them with many more chances to succeed in life? Who is so blind as not to realize that by supporting outdated definitions of masculinity and femininity we are mostly distancing our children from freedom and its consequent happiness? Lise Eliot's words in ending her book Pink Brain, Blue Brain solely represent this second chapter's conclusion:

Every boy and girl deserves the chance to develop the full range of his or her potential, unhindered by gender, race or other societal assumptions... Boys and girls will both lead richer lives and our society will benefit from the more complete development of their diverse and balanced talents. (314-315)
CHAPTER 3. THE EXISTENT BOND BETWEEN BOYS AND CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

3.1. How the “hidden curriculum” affects boy's reading habits

Professor of Children's literature Susan Lehr analyzes the extent to which it is the community's fault girls and boys are still being negatively gender-raised. It is common for parents to boast about how engaged we are in our children acquiring equality values and non-gender stereotyped behavior; but the reality still shows how thoughtless our own deeds are, and how easy it is for children to absorb all that
unconsciously provided information from the “hidden curriculum”\(^ {19}\) as true. De facto, this undisclosed curriculum we share daily holds much more power than the explicit curriculum we teach at schools or are taught as students. “Does the typical elementary classroom stifle boys by expecting them to be rowdy and quiet in the same instant? ... Does the typical elementary curriculum set up passive expectations for females by rendering them invisible in the curriculum?” (Lehr, “The Hidden Curriculum” 1), to which I would add; doesn't the typical elementary curriculum set too high expectations for boys in terms of power, strength, mental control and coldness by only providing them with the typical hegemonic masculinity? What is also intriguing is that teachers must also work hard to help overcome frequent personal absentminded errors as regards gender by constantly policing their own teaching practice. As professor Belinda Y. Louie of the University Tacoma in Washington comments, even Mem Fox —unceasing author in the battle of gender stereotypes in children's literature— “can still be easily tricked into writing badly as far as sexist portrayal concerns, when she is not deeply monitoring her stories” (“Why Gender Stereotypes” 143). Thus, would it not be smart to provide pupils with a handful of books in which both girl and boy characters showed their full potential? Would it not be a great idea to offer them books in which characters were displayed as well-rounded beings instead of blue/pink tokens of a binary universe? Even better, how about presenting other than the typical portrayed character? A queer boy, for instance, an emotional little boy, or a gay teen would count as innovation—not invention—as far as boy characters are concerned. As a matter of fact, boys who do

\(^ {19}\) By “hidden curriculum” we mean everything which is not included in the educational laws as official content to be taught, but is however transmitted in the classroom through words, actions or beliefs.
identify with the typical masculinity portrayed in children's literature are given practically no other chances to fulfill their own particular masculinity (Thyssen 7). By amplifying the masculinity spectrum in children's literature not only will a lot of commonly ostracized boys finally feel taken into account, but all children will get the chance to enjoy a new reading experience outside of conventional normative parameters, which will teach them on how not everything is just black or white, blue or pink. After all, what better way to open children's minds than by using children's literature?

3.2. Studies about gender stereotypes in children's literature

In the past there have been numerous studies rendered to the analysis of children's books in terms of gender biases. The most popular and recurrent research is that carried out by Weitzman et al. in 1972 —considered as a groundbreaking study at the time— which devoted to surveying books so as to determine the frequency in which boy characters or girl characters made their appearance, the outcome being that boys showed up three times as much as girls did. It must be denoted that all the books included in this investigation had either been awarded Caldeccot Medals20, Newbery21 Honors or belonged to the popular series Little Golden22 books. These results stress our blindness towards gender stereotypes, as these are supposed to somehow represent “positive educational” literature titles for

---

20 “The Caldecott awards are given annually by the Children's Service Committee of the American Library Association for the book with the best illustrations” (Williams Jr. et al. 149).
21 The Newbery Medal “is awarded annually by the Association for Library Service to Children, a division of the American Library Association, to the author of the most distinguished contribution to American literature for children” (www.ala.org).
22 The Little Golden Books are a very popular series of children's books.
our children. The aforementioned study served as the basis for many others implemented later in time analyzing their correspondent contemporary children's books.

For instance, in 2002, Carole Brugeilles et al. published “Male and Female Characters in Illustrated Children's Books or How Children's Literature Contributes to the Construction of Gender”, a study which concludes saying that:

Illustrated children's books are based on the supremacy of the masculine and the weight of the adult generation, that lead to sexual hierarchy and to subtle differentiation of roles. As such, they promote non-egalitarian social relationships between the sexes. (264)

This study emphasizes how powerful children's literature is in transmitting gender stereotypes to future generations, something we must not ignore as educators. Investigators Ly Kok and Findlay undertook the mission of exploring sex-role stereotyping in Australian award-winning children's picturebooks in 2006, when practically all previous investigations carried out concerning gender stereotypes in children's literature had only dealt with American titles. The results fortunately differed from the above mentioned predecessors as can be read below, though it must be denoted that only 25 books— from the mid 1970s to the 2000s— were examined in this study:

no evidence of stereotyping was found with regard to activities, with male characters not participating in instrumental–independent activities and masculine traits any more often than their female counterparts, and female characters not engaging in passive–dependent activities and feminine traits any more often than male characters. (248)
In 2007 the article “Gender Stereotyping and Under-representation of Female Characters in 200 Popular Children's Picture Books: A 21st Century Update” was published by Mykol Hamilton et al. to confirm that contemporary picturebooks still continue to reinforce the idea of boys supremacy over girls, pointing out a lack of balance in the portrayals of gender roles in 2007. However, as negative as these conclusions are, we cannot help but recognize the tremendous progress being accomplished in this terrain. Yet, as mentioned at the beginning of Chapter 1 most of this advance has only been achieved as regards girls presence and their roles in children's books; whereas boy's roles and attitudes conserve mainly the same status they used to have at the time of Weitzman et al.'s research, conducted back in 1972.

In 2011 Janice McCabe et al., professors at several North American Universities came together to analyze “Gender in Twentieth Century Children's Books” and their findings did not reveal much improvement as regards gender representation in the children's literature realm:

Gender is a social creation; cultural representation, including that in children’s literature, is a key source in reproducing and legitimating gender systems and gender inequality. The messages conveyed through representation of males and females in books contribute to children’s ideas of what it means to be a boy, girl, man, or woman. The disparities we find point to the symbolic annihilation of women and girls, and particularly female animals, in twentieth-century children’s literature, suggesting to children that these characters are less important than their male counterparts. (218)
In a study conducted by Tepper and Cassidy which analyzed the kind of emotional language found in children's picturebooks it was concluded that: “Analysis of character prevalence indicated that males had higher representation in titles, pictures and central role. Contrary to expectation, males and females were associated with equal amounts of emotional language” (265).

This study differs from its predecessors in that for the first time neither roles, illustrations, nor quantities of gendered characters are the factors to be examined; rather it is the quality of emotional language which emerges in these works as related to its source. These two authors found that emotional language was in these cases equally associated to female and male characters. Notwithstanding, due to the latent drawback concerning gender stereotypes that exist in our present society —as regards toys, films, and children's literature— the result may not be the same in contemporary books. Hence, I advice a deep monitoring on the side of authors and readers for a healthy link between emotional language and gender.

Many other investigations (Turner-Bowker, Tepper and Cassidy, Kolbe and LaVoie, Gooden and Gooden) which extended or updated the previously exposed studies have helped to confirm how rigid and unequal the situation perseveres as regards gender depiction in the type of literature our children read. This does not mean we have not conquered new spheres, but it alleges how this progress still flows at the slowest pace possible.
3.3. Analyzing gender in children's literature

3.3.1. Gender roles in children's literature

As time goes by and society, up to a certain degree, seems to evolve so too should children's literature pursue a constant adjustment to the new modern times. As a consequence, we have finally created books in which girls are depicted as super heroines, police officers or pilots among other “masculine” professions. Indeed, these type of feminine portrayals are not so rare anymore which shows how we have learned to accept this new situation in real life, circumstance which has extended beyond life into books. Girl characters are now more active, adventurous, risky, not always placed in domestic settings, and eventually the protagonists of many books. Thanks to this metaphysical evolution, equality seems to be getting a little closer although the negative side of this progression might be “the risk of further naturalizing masculinity and of perpetuating the assumption that girls are gendered whereas boys are just naturally boys” (Wannamaker 122), which validates how the process of broadening the feminine sphere in the girls' universe is definitely not enough. Opposed to this subtle advance as far as girls are concerned, boys' growth or maturation process as characters in the children's literature field still appears to be static or even nonexistent. Boys' roles in children's literature persist on being those of knights, wizards, firefighters, superheroes, truck drivers, etc. Yet, it is still extraordinary to see a boy character performing as a ballet dancer, an artist, a teacher or a homemaker. What is more, it is not only in these traditional roles that boys are fully trapped, since as far as emotions are concerned boys are also denied the opportunity to demonstrate their feelings. If we take a quick peek at our children's
literature panorama we will appreciate how there is very little love, crying, or fear manifest in boy characters' personalities, unless of course this fear appears to be overcome with that of bravery (Huck, Introduction viii).

Annette Wannamaker shares a very lightening conception in saying that the figure of the boy is considered in children's literature as a subject-in-becoming, whose objective is to become a subject by moving from the dichotomy child to adult. Opposed to this, gays or women, for instance, will not be able to achieve a full subjectivity as they cannot surpass from positions denoted as Other (Wannamaker 31). Nevertheless, this boy's future subjectivity will always be circumscribed in a patriarchal society that will paradoxically deny any boy's agency away from normative values. Children's literature should address itself as responsible for trying to partly solve this problematic:

Children's literature can make a significant contribution to whether or not child readers understand the conflict between the possibilities of forging a new subjective agency and the propensity of a social structure to represent itself as always already given and inevitable. (Stephens, Ways of Being Male xiii)

For the previously exposed reasons any boy's subjectivity should go through an abjection process so that the boy becomes the new “other”. Professor Perry Nodelman wonders in “Making Boys Appear” if children's literature is sometimes unintentionally but implicitly homophobic (12). It is true that boys have been the main characters of the stories but it is also true that this has taken place at the expense of being entitled no freedom as regards roles, manners, or preferences. Boys
have always bound to the hegemonic masculinity values that societies have dictated for them. Hence, I unquestionably support Nodelman's view of the existence of a hidden layer of homophobia in our children's literature titles, whether deliberate or not, because only one option of masculinity seems to be valued and respected.

3.3.2. The power of discourse and sexist language in children's literature

Language is another crucial issue at the time of questioning how gender is performed in children's literature. As Susan Lehr signals, words hold an immense power and might even be used as weapons ("The Hidden Curriculum" 7). In fact, boys learn and internalize the power of sexist discourse at an early age, as pronounced by Valerie Walkerdine in Lehr's article (7). Blogger Del Rapier affirms that "the binary gender system creates a language that instructs the listener on qualified gender appropriate behavior" ("Gender Fluidity"). Newly produced children's literature should be aware of this fact so as to try to prevent early contaminations of children with sexist language.

In 2005 professor Ramesh Nair, from the University of Technology MARA, conducted an interesting study on the topic of sexist language in children's literature. For his research, Dr. Nair made use of the following popular fairy tales: Cinderella, Snow White, Rapunzel and The Sleeping Beauty which were scrutinized by students in search of possible gender biases present in their plots. The outcome of the experiment has been shared by Nair as a positive awareness among students of what sexist language involves since they were able to learn the way "language had the
potential to subtly spread sexist ideology” (Nair 58), in particular among the youth. “If language does shape and condition women or perceptions of reality, then parents who desire equality for their daughters or egalitarianism for their sons ought to look more closely at what their children are reading” (Taylor 306), and if it is the case of gender stereotypes existing in those texts then adults should provoke a mandatory discussion so as to make gender concepts clear enough for readers.

Concerning written language, there seems to be a lot of controversy about the fact of using generic terms such as he or man where women should be included as well. There have even been some attempts on creating new pronouns such as “tey”, “e” or “E” which did never seem to satisfy either readers or writers. Critics of this effort see it as an anodyne detail uniquely appointed by “those obsessed feminists”. Notwithstanding, supporters such as Mary Crawford and Roger Chaffin signaled through their investigations how:

There is empirical evidence to support the claim that “generic” masculine language is ambiguous and is interpreted differently by men and women. When both men and women read the word “he”, a male interpretation (the default value) initially predominates. But if women are not to exclude themselves from what they read, they must do additional mental processing to transform the initial literal interpretation into one that includes them. (16)

These conclusions may not be very easy to perceive unless we are literally made aware of the gender-stereotyped universe in which we live. Nevertheless, the following joke shared in the LetToysBeToys site will open anybody's eyes in how easy it is to misunderstand gender and consequently many aspects in life, due to discourse.
A father and son are out cycling together. Suddenly a lorry thunders past, knocking the son off his bike. He is rushed to hospital. In the operating theatre, on seeing the boy the surgeon exclaims: 'I can't operate on this child, he is my son!'

It will probably take us a couple of minutes to understand that the surgeon is not the father of the boy—who was cycling with him at the time of the accident—but his mother. However, the word surgeon will instantaneously make us think of a man and not a woman. Those are the kind of associations we unconsciously generate due to language, which in languages such as Spanish becomes even more critical, as there are word endings that clearly mark the sex; e.g., professor, profesor-a, and up until some decades ago certain options did not even exist; such as médica, bombera, científica. Notwithstanding, at the time of using the generic term in Spanish we will always use the masculine term, thus provoking the unconscious message mentioned above that men “rule” the world.

Nevertheless, there are many easy things we can do to improve the missed visibility of both girls and boys, though in different spheres, in our language. Jennifer Klein enlightens us with different options so as to avoid using sexist language without having to repeat the he/she pronouns or the his/her possessives which make reading and writing much more tedious. In her article “Avoiding Sexist Language” she covers three different obstacles encountered when trying to omit sexist discourse. The first problem to overcome appears when we realize that all subjects are male, to which she proposes three solutions: 1. “try making the subject of the plural”, 2. “substitute a noun subject instead of a pronoun”, and 3. “substitute
the first or second person for the third”. The second hurdle is to find a gender-neutral singular pronoun to which she proposes “dropping the pronoun and substituting with a non-descriptive article” or “using they if possible”. Finally Klein invites us to battle inherently sexist words by using alternatives such as firefighter for firemen or server instead of waitress and waiter (Klein). Most of the times it depends solely on us whether to use or not sexist language, as it is just a question of being cautious, alert and responsible. It might certainly feel as awkward and even useless effort at the beginning, but it will definitely have its positive outcome in the long run by having nobody excluded from our discourse.

3.4. Relationship between boys and the literacy sphere

According to Susan Lehr girls read “in 'resistant' ways, outside the male 'canon', and for their own purposes” (“The Hidden Curriculum” 11), even outside the school curriculum. Nevertheless, boys consider reading as a “female sphere”, i.e., something effeminate and as a consequence tend to reject it. One of the reasons for this antipathy in boys towards reading might have been caused, according to university lecturer Beverley Pennell, by the urgent need there was for feminine subjectivity to come as visible in fictions, which originated an unconsciously unwished outcome; “the process of pluralizing and resignifying feminine subjectivities often meant a concomitant demonizing of masculine subjectivities” (56). I utterly dissent with Pennell's view since although it is true that feminine subjectivities in children's literature have greatly improved as far as quantity concerns it does not imply abhorring all types of male subjectivities. What is more, the
improvement which has taken place as regards the feminine realm in children's literature is in many cases quantitative and not qualitative; the newly included characters are usually either background characters still performing very gendered-stereotyped roles. Even in those cases in which women become protagonists of the stories we are sadly shown gender-stereotyped women on the back, which contradict whatever ideas were meant to be disclosed about girls' or women's empowerment.

In order to entitle girls' presence in our libraries without leaving boys behind Belinda Y. Louie proposes “to look for stories with dynamic female characters and action-packed plots” (144). Some examples of books suggested by Louie which follow the aforementioned principles are: Philip Pullman's *The Firework-Maker's Daughter*, Louise Erdrich's *The Birchbark House* or Joan Lowery Nixon's *Who Are You*? Pullman's work presents us with a girl determined to become a firework-maker against her father's will, as he does not acknowledge such a job as a suitable one for girls. In *The Birchbark House* we are revealed how its protagonist, a girl named Omakayas, was the only survivor of a smallpox epidemic that destroyed her whole community. And lastly, Lowery Nixon's *Who Are You*? will guide its main character, Christie, into solving a dilemma on her own about a man who has been investigating her forever.

Nonetheless, it is not only a question of empowering girls in children's literature by including more and better girls' or women's portrayals. Boys need their space too, and they are also definitely in need of other quarters than the commonly presented hypermasculine domains. As Illinois University Professor Roberta Seelinger Trites claims, “some of the most poignant feminist children's narratives are
those which recognize that traditional gender roles have been as limiting for boys as they have for girls” (5). Twenty-first century feminism wants both girls and boys, both women and men to have more fulfilled lives, in which gender stereotypes are given no place to exist. Former children's literature teacher Elizabeth Segel also exposes that “the greater pressure on boys to confine themselves to male-typed reading and behavior, though stemming from the higher status of males, is revealed to be at heart a limitation” (182). Boys do not seem to be entitled to enjoy all types of books, and in many cases it would even be shameful for them to be caught reading a “girl's book” simply due to the fact that this reading is associated to the feminine sphere. Tony Porter, popular activist against women violence and co-founder of the American Association “A Call to Men”, provided a blatant example of this girl's aversion in the talk he delivered at TED in 2010 and which has been viewed 1,790,563 times as of October 2015:

I can remember speaking to a 12-year-old boy, a football player, and I asked him, I said, "How would you feel if, in front of all the players, your coach told you you were playing like a girl?" Now I expected him to say something like, I'd be sad; I'd be mad; I'd be angry, or something like that. No, the boy said to me — the boy said to me, "It would destroy me." And I said to myself, 'God, if it would destroy him to be called a girl, what are we then teaching him about girls?' (Porter)

23 TED: Stands for Technology, Entertainment and Design; it designates a nonprofit association which holds outstanding conferences on many different subjects several times a year.
As regards this feeling of hostility towards girls and the books conventionally addressed to them Kymberley Reynolds remarks how reading is “gendered”:

Many texts directed at boys offer, very limited, almost invariably conventionally masculine models and vocabularies for their young male readers [...] making it difficult for boy readers of children’s literature to avoid the conclusion that the only natural, normal and acceptable way of inhabiting a male body involves accepting the stereotypical attributes of masculinity. (108)

Opposed to this, girls seem to find no problem in reading books originally addressed to boys since society regards such a deed, albeit not always truly desirable —“boy's topics” include getting dirty, name calling, violence, etc— as harmless for girls. Another likely cause for boys not wanting to read is the fact that their fatherly models do not read either, since in this fixed binary-world children tend to emulate same sex progenitors. This belief is based on the social learning theory exposed by Bandura which deals with social imitation or modeling: “Fortunately, most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action” (22).

I absolutely agree with Bandura in this copy-cat theory, though I cannot fail to add that from my experience as a teacher, dealing with primary-school pupils' parents, imitation through modeling is not always a fortunate circumstance, since children will not only imitate positive behavior but negative attitudes, habits and
actions performed by their adult models as well.

Neuroscientist Lise Eliot affirms that research has proved how parents “expect their sons to read less well than their daughters” (180). Hence, if boys grow up perceiving reading as a feminine activity they will surely reject it as an action not belonging to their sex, which is an absolute loss for them in every sense. Kathy Short, professor from the University of Arizona, also enlightens us with some more “reading truths” in her article “Why do Educators Need a Political Agenda on Gender?” when she proclaims that “girls will read boys’ books but boys won’t read girls’ books” and that “girls prefer fiction and books about relationships while boys prefer nonfiction and books with a lot of action” (188). Anybody professing traditional gender values would probably find justification in this type of statement by denoting how evidently this proves that boys and girls are different from their very early years. The truth is that every child has been literally raised to enjoy certain sort of literature, certain types of toys, certain color or certain music — among many other things — depending solely on some specific physical features, and not on how one identifies.

Let us recall the SUNY Binghamton experiment mentioned in Chapter 2 (see p. 54) in which boys and girls reacted differently whether they were observed by their peers, confirming once more how children live under certain gender pressure. This peer or group pressure phenomenon was first analyzed and proved right by psychologist Asch Solomon in the 1950s when he demonstrated how we will act differently as we think it is correct or desired if pressured by a group. His investigation was named the “Asch Conformity Experiment” or the “Asch
Paradigm”; in it a group formed by some confederates and a genuine participant were asked different questions. For instance, after being shown the image exposed below they were asked: “which of these other lines equals the target line?”

Figure 23: Image from the “Asch Conformity Experiment”

As all the other members of the group failed to give the correct answer, the real participant adheres to their wrong answers no matter his real opinion, which validates how the pressure from the group will instill doubt, no matter how obvious the answer may be. We can thus infer the reasons why a child will choose to mold to a group with the unique aim of not standing out, i.e., a boy will play with a truck even if he would rather choose a doll if he feels he is being judged by the group.
3.4.1. Different practices carried out to encourage boys to read; advantages and disadvantages

Writer Janet Hickman maintains there are two kinds of readers; practiced readers and inexperienced ones. The former have the ability to navigate around the information so as to select the piece they consider as true, a crucial ability in the era of “infoxication”\(^\text{24}\). Nonetheless, inexperienced readers will assimilate anything as real and believable (92). Children, and more particularly boys, not being voluntary free readers in their majority are not capable of discerning some narrative facts. Accordingly, it is their teachers' duty to provide them with the necessary mechanisms to sort out reality from fiction. Annette Wannamaker observes that:

> Changing the ways our culture perceives dominant masculinity must begin with marking masculinity as a gender, making visible the ways it is socially constructed and evolving and creating spaces for child readers to see themselves as agents of change. (148)

We still need to empower females in children's literature, which does not exclude the possibility of motivating male readers too. Nonetheless, let us be thoughtful on the ways or tools we use to stimulate boys, so as not to provoke an undesired effect on them.

3.4.1.1. Guys Read initiative

Children's author Jon Scieszka conducts a project aimed at encouraging boys to read. His proposal, labeled as *Guys Read*, is thoroughly explained on the website

\(^{24}\) Infoxication: it refers to information overload.
in which he assures that whether due to biological or sociological features the issue is that boys do not read. Hence, Scieszka intends to motivate male readers by choosing what he considers as the “appropriate” topics. I could not agree more with Scieszka's opinion until I came to terms with what the word “appropriate” meant for this author by visiting his site. I will refer back to some of his authorship further in this chapter but I would like to emphasize that by his chosen method he is yet again segregating by gender. His web page may encourage a part of the population to read; however, he is definitely overlooking not only girls, but any boy who does not fall under his “boyish” category.

On the *Guys Read* website everything is associated to the commonly regarded “male issues”; from its title, to the themes of being naughty, adventurous, having a preference for wheels, use of certain shades —black, red or blue; no pink allowed, etc. Even though the main idea of the project, helping boys to read, may sound appealing and even exemplary at first sight, and from all its marketing and international development it seems to be truly working, the counteractive side is that it is actually only addressed to boys willing to engage the typical hegemonic masculinity. What if the boy is the “emotional type” and does not enjoy reading those kind of books? Isn't he enough of a “guy” for Scieszka so as to be included in the *Guys Read* program? What if a girl loves most of the books the founder of the project proposes? Is she a tomboy? May this type of girl be admitted as “guys”? Can't they be part of his project? Why not? Just because a person wears dresses does not mean she must prefer pink to blue in her books, or dolls to trucks in her favorite literature topics. Should we then think of it as something physical, biological?
And if it is; are these tastes then associated to body genitals, chromosomes, gonads, or hormones?

From my point of view, author Jon Scieszka has been somehow engulfed by the binary world we live in, being unable to see further ahead. I would like to clarify that the answer to my plea would never be solved by making an analogue web page named something like *Gals Read*, because all types of children have to be motivated to read no matter their biological or sociological features. Reading encouragement should not leave anybody out due to sex or gender, and literature and more specifically children's literature should be utterly open, diverse, and limitless as regards topics, tastes, addressees, etc. Then, it is only the children's momentum to choose their favorite genre or story without being conditioned by any “silly label” society has consciously—or not—attached to their brains.

### 3.4.1.2. Packing the classroom or school library with books filled with “masculine” topics or male protagonists

In some cases teachers decide on loading the program with books dominated by male protagonists—something easily accomplished even unconsciously as “men do still rule the curriculum” (Lehr, “The Hidden Curriculum” 13)—so that reading will appeal to boys as well, what would be reckoned as Scieszka's strategy. By endeavoring to improve boy's literacy this way, we are actually giving both girls and boys a misguided lesson as regards gender and its power. Johnson and Mangat formulate a question which would probably arise another dissertation on its own; “Does privileging males as central in text extend or
limit boys' constructions of masculine identities in the contemporary world?” (135). I personally regard this deed as highly negative for boys up to the same extent as I disagree with single-sex schooling. Boys and men are neither alone, nor superior to others in the world, a fact which they should become conscious of from their very early years, and children's literature cannot look the other way.

3.4.1.3. Discarding traditional children's literature from school due to gender stereotypes

Going back to the classroom library arrangements it may also be highlighted how in other cases some teachers, proud of their own gender stereotype awareness and even having undergone some type of gender sensitivity training themselves, may wrongly decide to purge the school library of all traditional folk tales in an attempt to keep their pupils from accessing biased harmful contents. Yet, this other option should not be considered as advisable or correct either. As I have previously exposed, any past time literature might be regarded as worthy as long as it is presented at an appropriate age and through a correct teaching guidance. Author Jennifer Armstrong reminds us how:

It is helpful to have stereotypes to hold up for comparison. The trick is not to get stuck up on the surface (…) By doing what adults should always do with young readers: guide them toward progressively more challenging books. By exposing kids to other examples of fictional characters, personalities that are much more complex and much closer to real, we can give them more stimulating models to examine. (“Popular Series Books” 54-55)
Different books belong to different eras in history and to different ways of understanding masculinities and femininities. It is our duty to make use of history and traditional literature to instruct children on how life used to be and how fortunate we are now to have a greater deal of possibilities in life—which does not mean the full deck of options is already available, mostly due to remains of obsolete patriarchy convictions—to accomplish our likes and wishes without the previous constraints imposed by society. Depending on the age of the children, we could even include some historical concepts to make it easier for them to conceive females' and males' ways of acting at specific times in the past—fact which does not justify certain deeds or behaviorism, but it surely helps to contextualize them. Senior Research Fellow Pat Pinsent argues as regard this fact that critics tend to over-estimate the effects of traditional literature on vulnerable readers: “Children cannot be protected from all expressions of intolerance in literature or in life. What is more important is that they have enough self-esteem and enough understanding of literature and society to contextualize such expressions” (Children’s Literature 14). Hence, once more it is the accompaniment of adults, teachers and parents in particular, which will help children better understand traditional gender-stereotyped literature.

Traditionalists such as Gurian or Terry Truman, cited in Boys in Children's Literature and Popular Culture do not fully support this thread of thought by suggesting that adults should help boys “to navigate the morally ambiguous terrain of popular culture and work to steer boys towards texts that are exciting and teach morals” (qtd. in Wannamaker 15). Opposed to this, I personally validate that boys, as well as girls, should be exposed to a wide range of materials that are not exclusively
concerned with learning decency and purity, but that pursue the mere joy and amusement of the reader as well, which takes us back to those types of texts from Schiezseca previously cited—such as passages which deal with scatological issues or rebelliousness towards adults—which does not imply letting children read whatever they stumble upon without the proper supervision. Stifling content in this way will result in reading never being met as a pleasurable pastime for many of them. Let us then not censor every title, but dialogue and debate about contents, while offering children other realities that counteract whatever stereotypes, bad habits, or conducts appear in the texts children like.

At any rate, as formerly Professor Pat Pinsent exposes, the polemics concerning traditional gender-stereotyped literature relies on the possibility of children being influenced by such books. Hence, this author proposes:

In the long run, the only possible answer is to make children into critical readers, able to detect and withstand all forms of prejudice, however subtly they are conveyed. Paradoxically, one of the most effective ways of doing this is to help them to work through books which may not always be perfect in their adherence to contemporary views about equality. (*Children's Literature* 419)

As a matter of fact, psychologist and writer Bruno Bettelheim illuminates the positive effects of the use of fairy tales in children's education:

a child needs to understand what is going on within his conscious self so that he can also hope with that which goes on in his unconscious. He can achieve this understanding,
and with it the ability to cope, not through rational comprehension of the nature and content of his unconscious, but by becoming familiar with it through spinning out daydreams—ruminating, rearranging, and fantasizing about suitable story elements in response to unconscious pressures. By doing this, the child fits unconscious content into conscious fantasies, which then enable him to deal with that content. It is here that fairy tales have unequaled value, because they offer new dimensions to the child's imagination which would be impossible for him to discover as truly on his own. Even more important, the form and structure of fairy tales suggest images to the child by which he can structure his daydreams and with them give better direction to his life. (10)

The importance that according to Bruno Bettelheim resides on the inclusion of fairytales—mostly gender-stereotyped—in our children's readings, must however be balanced along with several layers of critical thinking. By inviting children to be critical of what they read we will be teaching them to interrogate themselves about all this information they are immersed in. Not accepting their readings as true, but learning to question the ideas and principles which are provided in the books they read, will award children with one of the most essential tools to achieve success in the 21st century, critical thinking.

As regards folktales, author Charlotte Huck proposed different ways of overcoming the gender-stereotype issue in her contribution to the volume Beauty, Brains and Brawn. In the first place, Huck recommended resorting to folktales that are more gender equitable such as Princess Furball, Tam Lin or Lun Po Po among others. The second tactic Charlotte Huck suggested, so as to subdue gender bias in
children's literature, was creating a modern story but in a fairy-tale style. Finally she invited us to write a spoof of a traditional tale which would be later compared to the original work so as to search for prejudices (*Beauty Brains and Brawn* Introduction, ix-x).

Huck's first recommendation, the tale *Princess Furball* written by her and illustrated by Anita Lobel, is another version of the well-known *Cinderella* story, though in this case the beautiful protagonist will not be in need of the help of a fairy godmother to achieve her aims. This new plot is responsible for the transformation of the original passive character into a strong active woman. What is true, is that no matter how non-gender biased this story may profess to be, it still portrays many hidden stereotypes which, having been wrongly naturalized by society, remain concealed from the author's eye and in most cases from the audience's perception too. By way of illustration, beauty is once more reinforced as a key feature of women's success and the happily married couple climax turns the original story into another different way of achieving the same objective: being “saved” by the prince.

The second option Huck grants us with would also encourage boys to be creative while being awarded the opportunity of choosing from any topic of their interest. By subsequently adding fairy-tale motives to an up-to-date story, children will also be able to learn how to recognize bias in a traditional tale. Pennell cites Hollindale in saying that she claims for “the need for pedagogical practices that ensure young readers develop the skills to recognize the codes and conventions that construct the dialogism of fiction” (qtd. in “Redeeming Masculinity” 58), which yet again makes reference to critical reading and critical thinking.
The creation of the spoof tales technique mentioned as the third of Charlotte Huck's proposals may already be found in the market. As an instance, *The Red Shoes* by Gloria Fowler consists of a fabulous adaptation of Hans Christian Andersen's 1845 original tale. What is more, on this occasion the modern version is not as gruesome as the original in which the protagonist has her feet cut off after which they follow her endlessly performing a macabre dance. Fowler's book focuses more on feelings of strength and overcoming, while at the same time the protagonist is able to learn how she does not actually need her red shoes to remind her of her deceased mother. As a consequence, this new version of the tale, although still presenting typical archetypes such as the bad queen, provides a more up-to-date and less horrific account of the traditional story, which might make it more appealing to younger children.

3.5. How to overcome boy's gender stereotypes in children's literature

Perry Nodelman defines those works that fight boy's gender stereotypes as books:

about boys that purport to transcend the formula of popular fiction are about boys seeing through the conventional constructions of masculinity, learning to be more sensitive or more openly imaginative or literate or less caught up in the pleasures of aggressive bullying. ("Making Boys Appear" 11)

We have thus far exposed some approaches on how to use traditional children's literature, yet we should be open and alert to discover our own method so
as not having to renounce popular literature and make the best use of it instead. As this dissertation focuses on masculinities, I will now proceed to present some strategies on how to overcome the gender stereotypes issue in the boy's universe.

3.5.1. Turning to drama

From my own experience as a primary and preprimary teacher, I firmly encourage drama as a useful method of instructing children on locating bias in traditional tales. My decision has been partly encouraged by reviewing Professor Peggy Rice's study, in which she undertook drama as “a method to create spaces for children to expand their definitions of masculinity and femininity” (3). Rice's research is rooted on the theoretical framework of Vigotsky's\(^{25}\) social constructivism and Bakhtin's dialogics\(^{26}\). Her field study was conducted in a third grade classroom of a rural elementary school in the year 2002. The procedure carried out is described as follows. After having become a familiar figure in the classroom through interaction which took place during a few weeks, the study was initiated. Several books with non-gender stereotypical roles both for males and females such as *Oliver Button is a Sissy* (DePaola) or *Horace and Morris, but Mostly Dolores* (Howe), were presented to children for silent reading, after which they were asked different questions and had to rate the books on a scale from one to three providing their corresponding explanations. Next, they had to meet as groups to write those scripts and dramatize the stories to be asked to rate the books again. The results concluded that “the

---

\(^{25}\) Vygotsky's social constructivism theory deals with how social interaction affects what we learn and the way we learn as opposed to Piaget who affirms that what we learn depends on the stage of development we are in and not on the culture which surrounds us (McLeod).

\(^{26}\) Bakhtin's dialogics support that there exists a continuous dialogue between texts (Pinsent 26).
percentage of children who indicated they liked the story more after enactment was higher for the boys than for the girls with each of the stories” (Rice 7). This exercise helped Rice conclude that dramatizing stories powerfully influence children's awareness on the way characters are portrayed in non gender normative ways, in particular among boys. Rice's investigation demonstrates once more how it is more arduous for children to accept non-normative behavior in boys than in girls due to lack of examples in children's literature on the one hand— which makes the few existent stories bizarre— and on the other as a consequence of fixed beliefs transmitted by society as the correct ones, opposed to any other attitude described as unusual, abnormal, or queer. Rice's study functions as a magnificent example on how drama can be used as a stratagem to fight gender stereotypes. The chance of playing other people's roles, particularly if the role is that of the opposite sex —always departing from the false premise of the binary— enables children to realize the benefits or drawbacks of their counterparts lives. In the case of male characters accomplishing roles regarded as “feminine” by society, boys will have the chance of enjoying certain tasks or activities they would probably be ashamed of undertaking in their real lives. By immersing these boys in a relaxed atmosphere in which to try new characterizations they will learn how enriching and fun it is to embrace all types of roles, behaviors, and tastes, no matter their sex.

3.5.2. Subversion vs. morality in literary entertainment for boys

Literary critic Peter Hunt recalls the tension surrounding the definition of “what is good for the child socially, intellectually and educationally and what we
honestly think is a good book” (Criticism 15). Novelist and academic Alison Lurie also makes a distinction in saying that in her life there were:

two sorts of books on [the library] shelves … The first kind, the great majority, told me what grown-ups had decided I ought to know or believe about the world … But there was another sort of children's literature...These books... recommended—even celebrated—daydreaming, disobedience, answering back, running away from home, and concealing one's private thoughts and feelings from unsympathetic grown-ups. They overturned adult pretensions and made fun of adult institutions, including school and family. In a word, they were subversive, just like many of the rhymes and jokes and games I learned on the school playground. (ix-x)

The real issue with the marketing of specifically produced non-gender stereotyped books is: will boys really be interested in reading them? Before we proceed to search for an answer we must acknowledge that children's texts are written by adults; hence, any decision towards this type of literature will meet plenty of control by virtue of which, the children's book is often used as a tool to form the view of the child (Hunt, Criticism 51). Peter Hunt also affirms that “the gap between adult publisher and child-reader is such that it is difficult to avoid a sub-text of manipulation”(80). Children do not tend to consider “preaching” books as amusing; in truth, the kind of books boys take most pleasure in reading are those which show a disposition to ridicule adults, i.e., books in which boys feel free to behave as they wish by subverting grown-ups authority (Wannamaker 85).

Perry Nodelman has a point in saying that “Boys who are comfortable with
the dominant versions of masculinity portrayed in popular culture are not the target audience for those books endorsed by experts in the field of children's literature” (Wannamaker 19). Why would these boys be interested in reading breakthrough stories such as *My Princess Boy*, *William's Doll*, or *Little Zizi*? After all, these topics do not seem to apply to them after having incessantly taught by society that those are books for girls or “sissies”, and what they should be reading are stories such as *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, *The Three Musketeers* or *Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* instead. In spite of this first plausible distaste or refusal on the side of boys, it becomes our duty as teachers to offer them this “other” type of literature too. We must be conscious that boys may not like these readings from the beginning since they have never been confronted with such issues. Yet, feeling free from the pressure of not having to be singled out as the ones choosing certain works will benefit many boys by providing them with the chance to read other things they may appreciate.

3.5.2.1. Literature as part of a literary polysystem

As regards reading, professor Wannamaker affirms that “there is no monolithic 'Boy' ” (17), so each child will have a different reading experience which will not only be molded by books. Catherine Butler recognizes children's literature as a part of a polysystem and cites Shavit in saying that “the literary polysystem contains … both canonical and non-canonical books, but also a variety of media”

27 *William's Doll* by Tomie DePaola is a book in which a boy shows his desire for having a doll.
28 *Little Zizi* by Thierry Lenain is a book about a boy who starts getting worried about the size of his penis, fact which appears displayed as a symbol of masculinity.
(qtd. in *Teaching Children's Fiction* 86). This assortment of media is also referred by Anne Hass Dyson through the concept “permeable curriculum” which makes reference to a set of knowledge in which we do not only include the kind of fiction that is part of the literary canon, but all those varied types of popular culture in which children are immersed (qtd. in Newkirk 172). This culture is composed of a wide range of material apart from books including T.V., jokes, video games, etc. From my personal experience, I must add that television in particular has a strong power through the emission of commercials, films, series, and cartoons, all of which are extremely gender stereotyped.

One of the most well-known T.V. channels addressed to children nowadays is that of Disney — another subject deserving a thesis of its own. Due to Disney’s prominence, the sort of scenarios mentioned before in which girls are just “objects” being saved and boys their saviors are not only visible in literature but appear throughout T.V. and film as well. As an example, back in 1998, Disney released *Mulan* in which the titular character was a strong young woman who cross-dressed as a man to be able go to the war and thus prevent his elderly father, the only man in the family, from being called to battle. Although the plot in this case could be depicted as feminist at first sight, it has actually received much critique from that movement since the only way Mulan is able to succeed in the story is by becoming a man, fact which maintains women’s lower status on the hierarchical ladder. As regards the cross dressing maneuver, Senior Lecturer Victoria Flanagan affirms that the reason some characters cross-dress is “because of an inability to fulfill the conventional gender expectations attached to their biology and in doing so are involved in a
critique of traditional gender constructions” (80). If we think about Mulan, she would definitely not have been accepted to battle otherwise. Flanagan also exposes how in children's literature males dressing as females always provoke a humorous effect without anybody questioning their masculinity. However, “in female-to-male cross-dressing … girls dress as boys to escape societies which seek to repress and limit femininity” (“Reframing Masculinity” 78). Unhappily, the end of Mulan's story is a recurrent twist towards the patriarchal order, exposing that no matter how hard women try men still persist in ruling the world. It is Perry Nodelman who reminds us in his article “Making Boys Appear” that women's power usually lays in their beauty whereas boys' attractiveness lies more on strength, danger, or aggression (8).

In 2013 Disney presented a new type of princess-heroine in the film *Brave*\(^{29}\) who was not tall, blond, submissive and stereotypically pretty anymore —though still white— as most used to be. This “new model of princess” had supposedly arrived to break the mold, to present everything her previous counterparts had lacked. Amazingly, this 21\(^{st}\) century princess called Merida suffered from a posterior makeover which attempted to take her back to the archetype Disney princess. Out of the blue, Merida became much prettier, thinner, and appeared wearing tighter clothes; something the character had absolutely abhorred in the film. Luckily, this new version of Merida was exposed online and underwent such criticism that Disney had no choice but to remove it and bring back the real Merida. Find here below both versions of the princess (Child).

---

\(^{29}\) It must be highlighted that the film *Brave* was actually made by Pixar, a subsidiary of Disney.
One may think that this type of makeover only affect girls as we rarely observe it from a boy or man's perspective. Nonetheless, by promulgating such concepts through cartoons, ads, or toys, we are not only teaching girls that beauty is their most important thing and valuable trait, we are also transmitting these ideas to our boys who will also learn what or how girls must be and look in order to “succeed”. Accordingly, if a girl is not pretty, cute, weak, sensitive, etc. boys will feel she is not fulfilling the requirements of “femininity”. If we take this situation to its extremes, which tend to occur more often than appreciated, gender violence might make its appearance in teens and male adults.

Furthermore, boy characters are starting to see their bodies changed too through a process of fictionally “inserting anabolic steroids” which results in impossible to attain muscular figures. Just as girls are, boys might be influenced by such representations of masculinity, whose consequences can be incredibly disastrous. For instance, young teens whose bodies have not fully developed yet are feeling in need of spending huge amounts of time at gyms— with subsequent health consequences— so as to obtain the demanded masculine physique that they are
bombarded with through toys, comics, films, and children's literature.

In between this conflict, Disney manufacturers have somehow encountered a solution to keep girls' fascination with Cinderella's dreams, and boys' admiration or longing for Tarzan's muscles throughout the years. By managing to address a dual audience, i.e. both parents and children, Disney is able to perpetuate its money making machine. If we think about Disney's latest version of Tarzan we will notice how it represents a stoic, tough, muscle-bound man who develops to show feelings and tenderness as well. Accordingly, the character of Tarzan somehow moves from “the macho type” to a more sensitive persona. Tarzan's counterpart in the film is Clayton, a thorough representation of the negative masculinity. Wannamaker makes a reference to the conflict of different portrayals of masculinity by comparing it to the way many children feel in today's society in which they have to perform an incessant negotiation for the “correct” masculinity (66). In Divided Worlds edited by Mary Shine Thompson et al. we are told that “the notion of a more inclusive code of manliness which can encompass both aggressive and sensitive traits offers a subdued though potent hope for more peaceful negotiations in conflicts in the future (85)”.

In my opinion, there is still a long way so as to be able to be presented with healthier and more varied types of masculinities through the literary polysystem, to use Catherine Butler's words (see p. 149).

3.5.2.2. Subversive literature

Among non-canonic literature we encounter subversive children's literature in which the Captain Underpants series, for instance, will make appearance. The
dilemma with this series is that although it challenges hierarchies—as that of adults above children—its author, David Pilkey, unconsciously or not, reiterates the old masculinity values placing heterosexual males either over women or over feminized males. Fortunately, the passage of time—and some adult intervention too—will teach children that these ethics are not the desirable ones, so as to avoid feeling obliged to discard this type of literature. If not, wouldn't Japanese children be significantly violence prone after watching overaggressive manga cartoons? This fact highlights the agency factor as a crucial clue, however non-definite, and confirms how children are not as passive in reading, watching T.V. or playing video games as we used to think. David Russell also assures that boys are not blank slates, the “tabula rasa concept” stated by Steve Pinker (see p. 68) but active agents of their world. Subsequently, no matter how much children's literature leads children towards certain views or assumptions as regards gender, these will never be one hundred percent conclusive since gender learning involves a mixture of several layers including interactions within the children's native culture (17). Russell states how establishing censorship in children's reading “will not protect them from the seamier side of life” (70), and Beckett adds to this argument that “to fear texts because they embed children in ideology is to fear all social and communal aspects of human existence and all the pleasures they offer (11). Consequently and as usual it is adults' surveillance which will really help mold the child's unique personality towards a healthy tolerant education. Then again, it is undeniable that boys in particular will enjoy subversive readings as these type of texts tend to remove the anxiety boys feel about not fitting into any type of ideal male. What is more, these readings will
liberate boys from the pressure society's norms unceasingly exerts on them.

Another author who is gaining popularity while making use of subversion to drag children —boys in particular—to literacy is Jon Scieszka, whose titles such as *The Stinky Cheeseman and Other Fairly Stupid Tales* would make any old-school teacher's hair stand. Its creator, Scieszka, whom we have already introduced on page 137, brings traditional tales back to stage by turning their plots upside down. For instance, the wolf of the *Three Little Pigs*, story which Scieszka renames as *The True Story of The Three Little Pigs*, is not cruel and savage anymore; indeed, the animal appears depicted as an innocent victim of his bad luck in this newer version. This strategy, which consists in providing new identities to popular tale characters, makes reading much more appealing for children, and thus boys in particular will not feel out of place since reading this kind of humor is not considered effeminate by society. In such a manner, boys are invited to read free from any pressure or tension on behalf of the outer world. By creating subversion through the connection of traditional folktales and modern versions as Scieszka does in *The Real Story of The Three Little Pigs* we are making use of intertextuality, a very well-known methodology used in children's literature which results in a dialogic tension between the two texts. Pat Pinsent claims that: “For the intertextual references in recent parodic versions of the tales to be really effective, children need to have some understanding of the stereotypes which are being challenged” (*Children's Literature* 80). Professor Seelinger denotes how “intertextuality often serves the purpose of underscoring theme in children's novels, especially themes about agency” (39). Charlotte Huck has already been cited earlier in this chapter suggesting a similar
methodology (see p. 143) so as to conserve traditional tales in spite of the gender stereotypes they exhibit.

I wholly believe intertextual dialogue to be an exceptional tactic in establishing a link between traditional children's literature and contemporary children's literature; by arranging such a connection it will simplify the task of educating pupils on gender values, as they will feel at ease and free of impositions.

3.5.3. Using non-gender stereotyped children's literature in the classroom

The same way there exist different views on the definition and struggle of the aforesaid boy crisis, which have been detailed in Chapter 2, there are partisans of specifically written non-gender stereotyped children's literature and those who agree boys should go on reading traditional culture to be able to acquire the true values of masculinity in which males used to be hunters, owners and breadwinners. In effect, there are some critics who believe that books such as *Harry Potter* have acquired the greatest popularity because they straighten the hegemonic masculinity connotations instead of defying boys' selves (Wannamaker 125). It has even been remarked by this same author that these type of non-gender stereotyped works, in which she proceeds to include *The Wizard of Oz*, often become popular among gay or queer boys, in other words. These “abjected beings” may find in these narratives an escape to another world, away from the ordinary hegemonic mainstream culture. In these other literary worlds otherness is both warmly received and honored (133).

Non-gender stereotyped works have been arriving on the market for some
time now, which does not imply the newer the book the fewer gender stereotypes in it. As hard as it might be for our already gendered-polluted minds to perceive, even gender conscious authors should be extremely cautious in their writing. For instance, it is quite easy to come across books of female protagonists which loudly promote themselves as icons of the feminist theory while unconsciously portraying many secondary female characters fully gender stereotyped; or stories which highly succeed at displaying a plot which battles gender stereotypes in the surface but actually present very traditional secondary characters in the background, as it has already been mentioned on p. 132.

Let us remember there exists no politically innocent written text, above all if addressed to children, as words cannot help but convey our beliefs and life experiences thus consequently becoming agents of our thinking (Short, “Why do Educators Need” 186). If we study some works in which there are latent but masked gender stereotypes we may be able to discern some prejudices on the side of the authors, “within what Bakhtin has termed a 'polyphonic' mode”30 (Pinsent, *Children’s Literature* 26). What stands us irrefutable is that there is really no other choice, as silence is also a political position. Thus, by ignoring certain issues we may actually be implying they are acceptable too (Short 189). Pat Pinsent lets us know that next to the silence factor, the absence factor will be found. If readers do not find any character with which they can identify they may reject the book, and what is worse “if the characters with whom they identify are always portrayed as inferior as powerless, it is likely to encourage them towards different kinds of book choices in the future” (*Children’s Literature* 24).

30 Polyphonic: it refers to many different voices.
It is true that readers of all sexes and ages find pleasure in reading about “flat stereotypical characterizations and formulaic plots” (Lehr, *Anomalous* 195), the main reason being that by avoiding conflict with society norms children may feel comfortably at ease. Nevertheless, Lehr states that these types of stories “perpetuate myths of what it takes to be a successful male or female in contemporary society, and support the Cinderella version of living happily after” (195). Thereby, authors should “consciously provoke children to question gender stereotypes” (63) as Barbara Chatton alleges while appointing some of Mem Fox's works such as *Shoes from Grandpa* or *Tough Boris*, exemplifications in which this inducement to clash stereotypes is fulfilled.

The first book Chatton mentions, *Tough Boris*, is about a pirate who is tough on the outside but sweet on the inside. Such a different portrayal of a pirate teaches boys that crying or being sad is fine sometimes —contrary to what hegemonic masculinity values transmit. As it has been already pointed out, the gender stereotypes battle should not only concern the plot but the language, and in the case of dealing with children we must also take into enormous consideration the images of the literary works. This last issue will be more deeply dealt in the next chapter in which the picturebooks issue is covered. *Shoes from Grandpa* also breaks gender stereotypes through its plot by highlighting how even though the protagonist is offered multitude of “cute” clothing items to match the shoes grandpa has bought her, all she is in need of is a pair of comfy jeans.
3.6. Conclusion

We all probably agree on the fact that something must be done to avoid boy's gender stereotypes in children's literature from enduring, considering that literature is one of the main tools children use to feed their gender learning process. If boys are not granted new, more contemporary male models in the books they read, it will be beyond any doubt troublesome for them to link certain roles, attitudes, or behaviors to their sex. As Jennifer Armstrong admits, it is important for authors to counter-program and thus offer new male models in their books (“Popular Series Books” 53). In “Making the Invisible Visible” Johnston and Mangat argue that “Issues of masculinity are rarely foregrounded in literary study and students are given few opportunities to interrogate conventional assumptions about male gender constructions” (133). Since the invisibility of the genders makes it impossible for boys to see any farther than the binary, Perry Nodelman remarks on the need to question our premises about masculinity and “investigate how books for children express these assumptions, how they help boys and girls … to develop a dangerously repressive sense of what it means to be desirably masculine” (“Making Boys Appear” 2). Pat Pinsent affirms that if the reluctance of boys to read books with females heroes is overcome then, boys: “will have more to gain than female readers … For boys to admit to the 'feminine' side of their nature can be liberating., allowing them to acknowledge tender feelings and the need to express emotions” (Children's Literature 77).

What may we as teachers, parents or simply adults do so as to prevent these
unjust boy's gender-stereotypes from spreading? As it has been pointed out the use of
drama is a fantastic way of relieving social pressures connected to this thematic, but,
most importantly we should instruct children on how to read critically in order to
challenge certain attitudes encountered in books. As Short points out, stories should
be digested as “constructions of the world not mere reflections of the world” (“Why
do Educators Need” 190). Hence, discussion has to be introduced in the classroom
and in our homes, with the resulting debate being the first step towards the
eradication of archaic gender stereotypes.
CHAPTER 4. THE PICTUREBOOKS' BOYISH SPHERE

Picture books are often a child's first introduction to art and literature. To give him crude, stereotyped picture books is to open the way for everything else that is crude and stereotyped. (John R. Townsend qtd. in Hunt, Criticism 181)

Jean-Paul Sartre, existentialist French philosopher, once said: “childhood decides everything', and it is important that a wide range of challenging, inventively illustrate picturebooks features strongly in children's early reading diet” (Salisbury et al. 86). Hence, picturebooks must be regarded as an essential ingredient in any child's literary regime, and the reason why these type of books will be given a proper space
in this dissertation is linked to their high probability to prevail as a notable source of boys' gender stereotypes.

With the aim of understanding the tremendous influence picturebooks may have on children, I will proceed to present the subject of picturebooks: definition, structure, addressees, etc. This description will provide us with the necessary knowledge to be able to analyze what each single detail of picturebooks means and how literature might be employed as a tool to reach children easily so as to obtain wide ranging results. Words have always been accused of indoctrinating populations and we must not forget that picturebooks can exert the same power over infancy. Becoming aware of it is the first step towards a more conscious use of picturebooks.

4.1. Definition of picturebooks

From Comenius' Orbis Pictus, the first work considered as a picturebook (Nodelman, Words about Pictures 2) things have deeply evolved. Something we should always keep in mind is that a picturebook is much more than a book with pictures, otherwise known as an illustrated book. This thought is confirmed by Peter Hunt in his own definition of picturebook:

a text in which the verbal and the visual components both carry the narrative rather than merely illustrating or clarifying each other. It requires a new metalanguage to describe it. The encounter with the experimental picture book seems for the child to be akin to an oral encounter. (131)
The late Dr. Lawrence Sipe argues that picturebooks are “unified artistic wholes in which text and picture, covers and end-pages, and the details of design work together to provide an aesthetically satisfying experience for children” (*Picturebooks* 3). Hence, it is remarkable how in picturebooks every single detail is part of a whole, which is not complete unless all of them exist.

As a beautiful metaphor, Professor William Moebius once compared the reading of a picturebook with a musical composition when he said “we can't just skip to the first words of the story and begin reading; if we do so, it's like arriving at the opera after the overture is finished” (qtd. in Sipe, *Storytime* 15). Thus, according to Moebius we must concentrate on making the most out of all the parts of the picturebooks or we will be missing many crucial elements of the work itself, which were placed there by their authors —whether writers, illustrators, or both— with some specific purpose. Sipe affirms that “in semiotic terms, each part of the picturebook functions as a sign and has the potential to contribute meaning to the book” (“Picturebooks as Aesthetic Objects” 24). Carney and Levin's simile of picturebooks as “twicetold tales” denotes coherence too, since as these professors affirm: “both medium, verbal and pictorial may tell the story” (6). On her behalf, author Jane Doonan assures that picturebooks provide us with different types of experiences. First, she describes the visual experience; as picturebooks are in most of the cases pleasurable to perceive through the senses: sight, touch, etc. Second, Doonan refers to the verbal experience; for the reason that picturebooks also improve our literary language; and last but not least, an aesthetic experienced is highlighted since “pictures enable books to function as an art object” (8).
Salisbury and Styles tell us beautifully about the duality of picturebooks affirming that they:

Can be in the form of a playful dance, where images and words can appear to flirt with and contradict each other. Increasingly, the boundaries between word and image are being challenged, as the words themselves become pictorial elements and the outcome as a whole is a 'visual text'. (89)

Presumably, the most recurrent definition of picturebook is that of Barbara Bader, leading scholar in children's literature, who designates picturebooks as “text, illustrations, total design; an item of manufacture and a commercial product; a social, cultural, historical document; and foremost an experience for a child” (1). Bader also introduces the term “interdependence” to make reference to the relation between pictures and words as a core factor on which the picturebook relies along with the “simultaneous display of two facing pages” and the “drama of the turning page” (1). One of the most beautiful definitions of picturebooks I have personally discovered through my research is that of Anthony Browne, the highly praised contemporary picturebook author who says:

Making a picture book, for me, is not like writing a story then painting some pictures. No, it is more like planning a film, where each page is a scene that includes both words and images inextricably linked. What excites me is working out the rhythm of the story and seeing how much is told by the pictures, how much by the words, and how much by the gap between the two. (qtd. in Evans 194)
Before introducing ourselves into the subject of boyhood in picturebooks there are some remarks as regards the poetics of this type of books that need to be addressed, which will guide us to an improved comprehension of this universe, and hence a more suitable analysis of boys and masculinities depicted on them.

4.2. Picturebooks. Who are they for?

First of all, as opposed to what many people believe picturebooks are not plain books addressed to infants; an error which forces many children—as well as adults—to “resist picturebooks on the grounds that they are babyish”, as former primary teacher Stuart Marriott denotes (2). Jane Doonan also comments on the reason why older children consider picturebooks as “soft” readings. According to her this belief is related to the fact that they have never been shown all the intricacies these works can actually offer; “its physical form, and how words tell, and how pictures show, and what happens among the three of them, and what happens between them and the reader” (Looking at Pictures 9). Doonan proceeds to affirm that once children are exposed with the numerous reading possibilities picturebooks are able to provide, their way of perceiving them is highly modified.

Unfortunately, by the time children reach certain ages or educational levels they start feeling as if picturebooks are not addressed to them anymore; which results in a long, dark, sometimes endless period absent of all the potentially positive effects picturebooks might have had on them. This deprivation of picturebooks is such a loss for our youth considering that, regardless of how infantile or puerile picturebooks are regarded; the truth is that a great deal of them are actually extremely sophisticated.
This complexity applies to any picturebook, whether its intended audience belongs to the adult world or not. This is denoted in how Wolfengarger and Sipe affirm that “picturebooks create a playing field where the reader explores and experiments with relationships between words and pictures” (274). Scholar Perry Nodelman reckons that “picturebooks are clearly recognizable as children's books simply because they do speak to us of children qualities, of youthful simplicity and youthful exuberance, yet, paradoxically they do so in terms that imply a vast sophistication in regards to both visual and verbal codes” (*Words about Pictures* 21).

Further, since picturebooks are quite abbreviated we tend to think that characters making appearance in them must in consequence be simplistic, which is another absolute error, because the action of having to tell a story through illustrations and an average of two hundred words makes the choice of words and pictures a thoughtful and laborious decision. It is this brevity of narrative, indeed, which causes a unique “sharply focused” theme to “dominate the book” (Russell D. 123). On top of that, children in their not “grown-up-yet-world” have the magnificent ability to see the world differently from the rest of us, as indicated by writer and illustrator Roger Duvoisin. While adults present a tendency to only perceive the things of our interest, discarding any other additional information; children are naturally able to see the whole picture, as their immature minds have not been taught to make any choices yet (qtd. in Hunt, *Criticism* 180).

I cannot deny that it is generally us, adults, the ones who make the choices of which books to acquire for children. However, these decisions are easily mislead, as publishing houses and advertising campaigns exert major influence on purchasing
trends, inciting us to buy one or another book for our children solely depending on their marketing interests. Paradoxically, Martin Salisbury et al. highlight the fact that publishing houses continue to file children's picturebooks in age categories, whereas many contemporary authors are “creating cross-over books” that may appeal to diverse ages and levels (*Children's Picturebooks* 13). These cross-over titles demonstrate how one single book may be read in many different ways depending on the reader's age, background, and personality; thus, if we reject the traditional categorization, each reading experience should always be unique and not dependent on age, gender, or cultural ranges.

4.3. Picturebooks. How they are structured

In one of Professor Sandie Mourao’s interesting lectures describing the image-word duality inherent in picturebooks, she said:

> When the picture-word dynamic moves towards the complex end of the continuum, the pictures and words show and tell different information, they become multilayered, allowing for multiple interpretations, which means these picturebooks can be enjoyed by old and young. (Mourão)

Aesthetically, picturebooks are usually composed of thirty-two pages due to print economic restrictions. However, postmodern picturebook authors and some editors too are starting to call for a break in every type of constrictions as far as picturebooks concern. The new trends in the picturebooks universe keep demanding subversion, new themes, pictorial experimentations, modern formats, etc. Salisbury
et al. remark how “Some authors create complicated ‘metafictive’ picturebooks that playfully draw attention to the fabric and materiality of the book itself and are full of mischievous subversion of the normal conventions” (75). As a matter of fact, these are the type of aspects which will save the picturebook from its disappearance since it will allow it to endure through time as an aesthetic object instead of a bunch of words surrounded by illustrations prone to be converted in e-picturebooks. Wolfengarger and Sipe also highlight these extra features when they say that “In well-crafted picture-books, the author, illustrator, and book designer work together to make the book’s opening pages and changing visual cues both engaging and suggestive for readers’ interpretations” (274). This main idea is related to the peritext definition offered by Higonnet, as information is everywhere; “in the book’s dust jacket, front and back covers, the end-papers, and the dedication and title pages” (274). Perry Nodelman affirms that “the non-textual elements that create mood or atmosphere in picture books are not really separable parts or components. They are not objects within an individual picture but, rather, predominating qualities of a book as a whole” (Words about Pictures 41).

4.3.1. Picturebook parts

Picturebooks are made up of different parts which can all be used to intentionally convey information to the reader, and which may or not be related to the plot of the story. This does not mean that all picturebooks emphasize these parts, but in case they do readers should be aware of their existence, composition and possible intent. They are as follows: cover, dust jacket, front and end papers, dedication page,
title page, and back cover. With some elements, such as the dust jacket, including it in the publishing process raises the sale price of the book itself. As a result many writers try to do without in an effort to keep the books economically accessible. Sipe confirms that “all the elements of the picture-books which we see before we come to the first text opening ... communicate a mood and many give us signals about the thematic thrust of a story” (25).

4.3.1.1. Cover: The cover has a very important function in making us feel fascinated by certain characters or stories. The following cover belonging to *Morris Micklewhite and the Tangerine Dress* (2014) may serve as an example. In it we may see how the importance is drawn to the orange color of the protagonist's dress, inviting us to open the book so as to discover what that means.
4.3.1.2. Dust jackets: These may be equal or different from the cover — providing extra space to convey stories. Dust jackets are usually delivered with hardback books, its only disadvantage being the price increase this new component connotes. But in the case of our beloved books we cannot help wanting to have the dust jacket too, as it protects the cover of the book within, and provides more artistic work in many cases.

![Figure 26: Dust jacket of Fudge Pancake Tacos](image)

4.3.1.3. Endpapers: These might also be used to convey additional information. Sipe adds that they “may be printed in a color which is chosen to set the mood of the story” (“Picturebooks as Aesthetic Objects” 26), and in the case of being illustrated they usually match the design of the rest of the story. Here below you will see the endpapers for Where the Wild Things Are by Maurice Sendak, one of the fathers of modern picturebooks.
Salisbury and Styles affirm that “many of the rules picturebooks had largely adhered to up to this point were broken as Sendak used every element of his artistry to powerfully convey his beguiling story” (Children's Picturebooks 38). Most endpapers are alike but in some cases they may differentiate from each other so as to provoke some kind of reaction on the reader.

4.3.1.4. Dedication page: In it writers usually dedicate the book to somebody in particular or even leave some space for the person who gives this book as a gift to dedicate it to the new owner.
4.3.1.5. Title page: This page is devoted to the title, author name and publisher. Some pictorial symbols may be hitherto represented too. Figure 28 above displays both dedication and title page.

4.4. Pictures and words relation in picturebooks

“Picturebooks may elaborate, amplify, extend and complement the words. Or the pictures may appear to contradict or deviate in feeling from what their words imply” (Doonan 18). In How Picturebooks Work Nikolajeva and Scott enumerate the different relations that exist between pictures and words. According to them if both pictures and words are presented at equal level the relations is defined by its symmetry; if each part conveys different information, then they become complementary. Whenever a part lengthens the meaning of the other we are facing an enhancement type of relation; in the case of each part telling a different story they use the word counterpoint, and finally we will meet contradiction if words and pictures provide us with different plots as in Pat Hutchin's Rosie's Walk. Sipe engages the connection using the term synergy, which according to him:

is a good descriptor of text-picture or multimodal relationships in picturebooks, because all the sign systems, together, produce an effect that is greater than the effect that either would produce alone, resulting in an aesthetic whole that is greater than the sum of the individual parts. (Storytime 23)
Terminology such as congruency, elaboration, specification, amplification, extension, complementation, alternation, deviation, and counterpoint in referring to the relation between words and pictures had been elaborated by Schwarcz in *Ways of Illustrator: Visual Communication in Children's Literature*. On his behalf, Allan Ahleberg prefers the term 'interweaving' to refer to the word-image relation (Salisbury et al. 90), whereas Nodelman provides us with a new view of this connection:

many commentators say that the purpose of pictures in picture books is to “extend” the texts, but cognitive theories of perception suggest that extension may be the wrong metaphor. It would be more accurate to say that pictures limit the text — and to add that the text also limits the pictures. (*Words about Pictures* 220)

Sipe uses the word “synergy” which he says “is a good descriptor of text-picture or multimodal relationships in picturebooks, because all the sign systems, together, produce an effect that is greater than the effect that either would produce alone, resulting in an aesthetic whole that is greater than the sum of the individual parts” (*Storytime* 23).

### 4.5. Picturebooks. How to read them

Picturebooks present two different story lines: the visual and the verbal; these elements may, but are not required to go together as a whole. Yang Li-chung makes reference to Nodelman's view when he says that “approaches focused only on written
words or those based on art appreciation are partial or misguided because neither of them takes account of the narrative role of images in the picturebooks” (4). For instance, in *Rosie’s Walk* by Pat Hutchins the illustrations of the book are actually expanding the story which is reflected in the printed words. Peter Hunt adds that “one role of pictures in a picture book is to enhance the meaning of a story by illustrating the words, but good picturebook artists go well beyond that by inventing and developing additional story material” (*Criticism* 176); thus, the semiotic potential is exceptional. This is something highlighted by Nodelman when he says “Making ourselves and children more conscious of the semiotics of the picturebooks through which we show them their world and themselves will allow us to give them power to negotiate their own subjectivities” (“Decoding” 138). As Sipe reminds us “we see what we learn to see” (*Storytime* 18), thus training children on how to perceive all the details with which a picturebook is composed will provide them with the opportunity to better appreciate the whole work of art. If we add this quality to the already innate capacity of perceiving further beyond our expectations that children bear, we will be able to supply them with a new dimensional way of reading. As Short says, semiotic potential will not only help us at reading time but in our everyday life:

if learners were immersed in all of the sign systems in the same ways they are surrounded with language in schools, they would more likely use these systems in powerful and meaningful ways in their lives. (“Building Teachers Understanding of Art” 14)
Something we should avoid doing as teachers is continuously silencing children whenever they want to intervene in a read-aloud session because they have just noticed a new detail. Reading should not always have to follow a typical “I-read-you-listen-the-whole-story-through-structure”. Actually, picturebooks demand new ways of reading in which children should be encouraged to participate by deconstructing the story line too. Paraphrasing Lawrence R. Sipe on this, I may say that allowing children to talk during the read-aloud may result in a richer socially constructed meaning for the story, and a wider range of responses. Asking children to hold their response until the story is finished may simply result in the suppression of the responses (Storytime 230).

Notwithstanding, we are conscious that children are not as experienced as adults in reading, hence their ability of decoding the text is considerably lower than that of adults. Professor Hunt claims that “to read 'competently' is not merely a matter of acquiring knowledge, but of acquiring schemata. Children are somehow deconstructors of text because every act of reading reinterprets a text in terms of a universe of discourse “(Criticism 97). Every child possesses a unique universe of experience which will lead to a unique interpretation of the duality words and pictures, of the polysemy of the text. As Janet Evans says in What's in the Picture? “the texts are for us to interpret depending on who we are, where we are, what we need from the text, consciously or subconsciously at any particular moment and how we relate to the text whilst interacting to the who, where and what mentioned above” (Introduction xiv). She outlines an obvious negotiation between the reader and the text. Furthermore, we cannot but mention that “the full literary understanding of
picturebooks includes learning the conventions and principles of visual art, at least implicitly” (Sipe, *Storytime* 19). This is one of the reasons why this chapter is essential in the process of my dissertation as it will provide the bases for the original picturebook to be created, developed and understood in the fifth chapter.

On his side, Peter Hunt insists that picturebooks can be read in three dimensions; linear, temporal, or spatial (*Criticism* 132) and how “experienced readers are always re-reading: they are reading variations on themes, and structures they have absorbed before”(133). Professor John Stephens reminds us how “Audiences not only need to be able to decode the verbal text —its grammar, its syntax, its semantic structures, and so on but also need to develop an understanding of how to ‘read’ a picture in terms of the conventions by which it operates” (qtd. in Li-chung 5) as it has been mentioned above. Yet, as Martin Salisbury et al. remark, children will only try “to make sense of the 'readerly gap' created by the sake and tension between what the words say and what the pictures show” if the picturebook is really worth the effort (65); and that will not only rely on their preferences but on the enjoyment of the emotional exchange with reading that we as teachers, parents, and educators may have been able to transmit to them beforehand.

Illustrator Duvoisin affirms that “whereas images are perceived holistically, words are perceived linearly” (qtd. in Hunt, *Criticism* 180) and a picturebook may be described as having a good design when there is a sense of rhythm from page to page. Sipe describes the movement performed between illustrations and text every time we read a picturebook, as a back and forth flow which becomes an endless sequence of creation of new meanings (Sipe, “How Picturebooks Work” 102 ).
David Russell reminds us how reading in Western culture is conventionally carried out from left to right; hence, picturebooks will portray protagonists on the left and antagonists on the right page, otherwise called verso and recto pages respectively. If this is not the case, the author may be trying to provoke some kind of effect on the reader such as surprise, fear, etc. Yet, the reading of a picturebook is never the same process as with an ordinary book since in picturebooks; the constant referral between illustration and the text forces us to abandon the forward reading pattern. Moreover, picturebooks tend to prompt a natural pause in between the turning of pages; pause which in some cases evokes some kind of tension (Russell D. 135). Regarding picturebooks’ configuration it is interesting to highlight that they are usually wider than higher, yet characters tend to be taller than wider so as to provide ample space for background events (Nodelman, *Words about Pictures* 46). However, as rules are starting to dissipate in the picturebook sphere this fact may not continue to be applied either.

### 4.6. Picturebooks in the classrooms

When we read picture storybooks to children in early years of school, we are doing much more than simply indoctrinating them into the world of school-based literacy. We are opening them the richness, beauty and fascination of subtle and fascinating stories and gorgeous visual art. We are expanding their aesthetic experience exponentially. (Sipe, *Storytime* 6)
This previous quote is a crystal clear reflection of the positive effects that reading picturebooks may have on our pupils. As Sipe mentions, it is not simply a question of improving their literacy, but of extending their creativity in every sense. This author also adds that “Contemporary picturebooks are now recognized as more than useful pedagogical tools or nursery entertainments: they are seen as unique combinations of literature and visual art” (“Picturebooks as Aesthetic Objects” 24). The “Theory of Multiple Intelligences” first introduced by Howard Gardner in 1983 (Multiple Intelligences) provides us with enough evidence to believe that it is essential to teach children on how to interpret different sign systems and to communicate using varied ways of expression (Pantaleo n.p.). Janet Evans comments that, educators and students must work together to explore the unique artistic and literary connection present in picturebooks as not only authors’ words but, “great art by illustrators, photographers, calligraphers, graphic designers, painters and sculptors in picture books help [the] reader extend and enhance” (Foreword X). Thus, picturebook usage allows children to improve their perception of the world, their connection with the world, and their creativity in performing this process of communication.

Sipe incorporates the above mentioned ideas when he says that the personal stories that children bring to the stories they read “enhance, deepen and expand their conception of who they are and how they are part of their family, their community and the wider world” (“Young Children's Responses” n. p.). On his behalf, Hunt adds that there exists no such a thing as a perfect complete comprehension of a text as what the writer means is in most cases inaccessible to the readers and even to the
author himself (*Criticism* 50). Additionally, that understanding is just his or hers but never the only proper one, as there exists no such thing as the correct interpretation of a picturebook but just “other” interpretations. This is a great lesson teachers should take into consideration whenever they tend to guide pupils to a one-way understanding of picturebooks —and literature in general— when these, in fact, claim for multiplicity of comprehensions. Children's literature professor Kathy Short affirms that:

The problem is that, as educators, we often put so much emphasis on written language that we do not involve children in classroom experiences that allow them to explore the role of illustrations in picturebooks and of visual image in our ability to read our world. Teachers need knowledge about how pictures and visual images create meaning in order to plan classroom experiences and to take advantage of "teachable moments". (13)

### 4.7. Boys in picturebooks

Picturebooks play an important role in early sex role socialization because they are a vehicle for the presentation of societal values to the young child. Through books, children learn about the world outside their immediate environment. They learn about what boys and girls do, say and feel. They learn about what is wrong, and they learn what is expected of children their age. In addition books provide children with role models —images of what they can and should be when they grow up. (Weitzman 1126)
Traditional masculinities still largely rule the picturebook universe, just as they do in most types of literature. Hence, male characters are not given much freedom as regards attitudes, tastes or choices. This is clearly noticed in how fathers are in most cases presented doing some kind of outdoor activity which requires certain strength—such as sawing a tree trunk—or coming back and forth from their busy jobs. Should they happen to be portrayed at home, it will usually be reading the newspaper while sitting in their comfortable armchairs. We will almost never see them taking care of their children, doing the housework or showing their feelings unashamedly. Though we have repeatedly affirmed that children are not blank slates, it is true that these constant images tend to build certain beliefs in their minds which are hard to erase with the passage of the time.

Part of my research for this fourth chapter has been devoted to recording picturebooks in which boys or adult males were presented as doing something other from the typical “hypermasculine” tasks. The outcome is the following enumeration of items which I strongly advise should occupy space in our library shelves, whether at school or home. The reason the titles form this list date from the 1970s onward has to do with the symbolism this decade represents as a bifurcation point, to use Prigogine's terminology (Nikolajeva 66), being defined as the era when the feminist movement openly flourished. Each title is succeeded by a brief summary of its plot and a “second thoughts” section in which the way each book may helps audiences expand their masculinities range will be discussed.
4.8. Masculinities “out of the box” in picturebooks

The 1970s

- *William's Doll* (1972) by Charlotte Zolotow

**Summary:** The protagonist of this story, William, positively wants a doll as a gift but his dad constantly refuses to accede to his wish trying to push him towards other more “masculine” likes. William enjoys all the other toys he is offered too, but his hope for a doll remains unchanging. Eventually, William's grandmother convinces her son about the benefits of the child having a doll by telling him that this way William will learn how to be a good father in the future.

**Second thoughts:** Author Charlotte Zolotow wrote this book thinking about all those things parents were missing by not getting involved in the care of their children, and how the unique bond these tasks provided them could make them happier. Charlotte's personal experience with her husband made her realize this fact (*The Official Charlotte*). In my opinion, the end of this story may be regarded as appropriate for its time but the conclusion would not be the proper one in the 21st century. As we are not aware if William will or will not have children in the future, this is not certainly the only reason the protagonist needs to play with dolls. The chance of being offered all types of toys to play with will provide William with a richer and wider way of perceiving and accepting the world; the right moral to be learned from this story.

It is amazing how different studies have proved that gender
stereotypes persist throughout time in spite of the natural development of society in almost every other sense. This can be proved in a very interesting article written by Ellen A. Greever, Patricia Austin and Karyn Welhousen on this matter. These teachers happened upon a number of responses to the story of *William's Doll* which had been carried out by a group of fourth grade students in 1975. They proceeded to compare those answers back then with a new study of same age pupils but in the year 1997. They concluded that although the second study was performed almost 25 years later the answers were still widely gender-stereotyped. It is also fascinating how at the very end of this article we can read “maybe, just maybe, if we revisited student’s responses to *William's Doll* in 2010, we'll find children more attuned to gender equity” (329). Unfortunately, the truth is that we are now in 2015, and gender stereotypes remain a slow changing topic.

- **Ira Sleeps Over** (1972) by Bernard Waber

  **Summary:** Ira is a little boy who is thrilled about having been invited to spend the night at a friend's house until his sister taunts him for his decision to take his teddy bear with him; she argues that his friend will laugh at him. Ira finally decides to leave his teddy bear at home only to find out that his friend also holds on to another teddy whenever he is scared. Accordingly, Ira goes back home —they are next-door neighbors— to recover his own teddy bear not feeling guilty of needing it anymore.

  **Second thoughts:** Ira's sister thinks that he will be laughed at if he takes his
teddy bear because that means he is still a little baby. This situation would probably not take place had it been a girl carrying the teddy bear, the reason being that we tend to push our boys away from childhood sooner than our girls. The popular saying “be a man” is continuously addressed to little boys who should just be worried about enjoying their “being a child, not a man” phase. Girls on the other hand may continue being “little girls” for much longer, which is rather ironic, as it is well-known that girls tend to mature at a faster rate than boys both biologically and psychologically speaking.

- **Oliver Button is a Sissy** (1979) by Tomie DePaola

  **Summary:** This book presents Oliver, a boy who may to some extent, be regarded as Tomie DePaola's alter ego, since the author himself is said to have felt ostracized as a child for taking dancing lessons. Hence, he is likely to have written this book for other children to feel identified and proud of their own likes and hobbies no matter what. In this story Oliver does not want to practice sports, he would rather paint, read or dance instead; reason why he is constantly teased at school. Eventually, Oliver goes to a contest which he actually wins with his tap-dance show and his friends are so amazed that they stop calling him sissy, as Oliver has now become a star performer.

  **Second thoughts:** Tomie DePaola was absolutely right about how necessary writing this book was. Even though this story dates back to the 1970s there are still many boys who, almost fifty years later, must come to terms with
being mocked for choosing hobbies or activities which society does not regard as belonging to their sex; i.e., as not masculine enough. No matter how many males reach the higher spheres of the professional dance universe, this world continuous to be regarded as not for them. Hence, whether it is boys or adult males who engage in the dance world, they are usually confronted with negative connotations. Often they are even attributed a twist in their sexuality by being referred to as gays, fags, etc., as if sexuality was possibly inherent to a particular activity—dancing in this case. This story will help boys who do not want to follow the norm and it is also a great lesson for all those people who support outdated masculinities as it will make them see the other side of the coin.

The 1980s

- **Sam Johnson and the Blue Ribbon Quilt** (1983) by Lisa Campbell Ersnt

  **Summary:** This story is about a farmer, Sam, who starts quilting by chance. One day he discovers a tear in the pigpen and, being his wife away, decides to mend it himself. He finds this task so enjoyable that he resolves to join his wife's quilting club. However, this idea is neither welcomed by his wife nor by the other women from the club. Sam then decides to establish his own men's quilting club to compete against the women. In the end, both clubs are able to show a great work at the annual fair which makes everyone quite happy.

  **Second thoughts:** It is great seeing men demanding space in feminine
spheres. However, this story shows many blank spaces which may leave readers with the wrong idea. What we should learn from this story is that not only do women have the right to do men's hobbies or tasks, but that men should also be permitted to engage the so-regarded “women's jobs” without any kind of prejudices. Notwithstanding, if we take a closer look, men are presented hereabouts as being in the lower position on the power scale which has actually never been this way. The wife of the house is introduced as having the power to mock on her husband's new choice, which is not common either, and quite bizarre. What is more, one of the illustrations shows a sign saying “Equal rights for men!”, when it is men who have almost always possessed an excess of privileges. The story begs the question: how is it that the men become proficient at quilting in a few weeks when the women have likely needed decades to become experts? Couldn't this be wrongly teaching both girls and boys that men can do whatever they want much faster and better than women? As you can see, even with the aim of teaching gender justice we may be transmitting some wrong postulates as well. Having a woman performing negative masculine gender stereotypes such as abusing power, mocking, not allowing the other sex to participate and so on will only be to women's and girls' detriment as well. The story may also be used to call women's attention to not letting men carry on certain activities, which they consider are performed much better by their sex. For instance, many women still prevent men from contributing their fair share of time towards child care, which is as bad for themselves as for the fathers.
Not allowing men to get implicated will confer the wrong lesson, not only to them but to their children, who will as a consequence only link raising children with the figure of the mother.

**Max** (1984) by Rachel Isadora

**Summary:** Max is a baseball player who on his way to the park for his Saturday baseball game, accompanies his sister to her dancing classes. Max loves watching the girls dance at ballet classes and one day, as they arrive early he is invited to join in. The outcome could not have been better, as he finds it quite fun. Dancing provides Max with a great warm-up for his game, helping him hit a homerun.

**Second thoughts:** It is still quite bizarre to see boys linked to the dancing world in these times. Thus, this story is a beautiful way to bring a supposedly feminine activity into the boy's world without having to leave sports or other more “masculine” hobbies apart. By this means, boys will learn that they may be able to enjoy many different activities without having to uniquely adhere to a blue or pink world.

**Bill's New Frock** (1989) by Anne Fine

**Summary:** Bill wakes up one morning to find out he has become a girl. He goes to school with a frilly pink dress and his nightmare starts. All of a sudden Bill is not chosen to play football anymore, and he abhors the passive imprisoned Rapunzel role he is compelled to play in the school play. The
protagonist is confronted for the first time in his life with how unfair it is that by being a girl you are restricted from certain activities. In the end he becomes a boy again thus happiness returning to his world, which is displayed as more enjoyable.

**Second thoughts:** This is a story to be read and re-read in class as it provides us with a wonderful opportunity to work gender values. Notwithstanding, a non-guided reading may provoke children to absorb deeply wrong ideas; such as how horrible being a girl sometimes is and how great being a boy always is. The proper moral of this story should be that girls are limited by society in many ways, but so are boys. Boys are not allowed to read “girls' books”, that is, any book talking about love, sadness, friendship or any other feeling seems to be out of bounds for them. What is more, boys must forcefully take part in sports, fights, violent games etc. whether they enjoy these activities or not. Choosing any other path will make them feel out of place, as not belonging to their bodies or minds. If the protagonist of this book had been exposed to how great many “girl's” things were too, he would have found it fantastic to be able to try them even only just for a day. Nonetheless, he is presented with the negative side of having been born as a girl in this patriarchal universe. This is a wonderful candidate to be performed in the classroom through drama so as to make boys perceive things from the other side, and have them change the way they conceive the girls' world.
The 1990s

- *The Piggy Book* (1990) by Anthony Browne

**Summary:** Mrs. Piggot is a woman who works endlessly all day for her husband and sons. Besides working outside the home, she is the only one in charge of the housework without receiving any kind of support or recognition from her family. One day Mrs. Piggot decides it has been enough and disappears leaving a note for her family accusing them of behaving like “pigs”. From that moment on, the author conducts a fantastic twist in his illustrations, so that these three lazy characters start looking more and more like real pigs. One day Mrs. Piggot agrees to come back, but only under certain conditions, such as having help with the housework from the rest of the family.

**Second thoughts:** Children in general, and boys in particular, are so used to seeing their mothers doing the housework that they tend to take it for granted. Cases in which little girls do help at home while boys are allowed to idle around just because they are boys still persist in our times. This is a great book to teach children to help at home, in particular those who are still young, for it is an easier moment to have some habits generated. Nevertheless, this help should not only be regarded by boys as “helping mum”, but as doing their fair share of the housework which should also be distributed in equal parts between both parents.
• **Jump** (1992) by Ormerod and Magorian

  **Summary:** Steven is a boy who accompanies her sister to dancing classes every Saturday. Deep inside he longs to take part in those lessons but his mother says those are girls' things and boys should just be doing other activities, such as basketball. The climax of the story takes place when Steven decides to take part in a dancing show and succeeds with a brilliant performance. That is the time when his mother realizes he might also be a fabulous dancer in the future.

  **Second thoughts:** We may find this story rather similar in its plot to *Max* by Rachel Isadora. No matter the two decades of difference between their publications, the truth is that the topic is still an issue we must confront. We should notice here how it is not the father, but the mother of the boy who reinforces girls' only activities, which gives us the chance to discuss on how women are also responsible for transmitting mistake biases to their children.

• **Pinky and Rex and the Bully** (1996) by James Howe

  **Summary:** Billy is a boy who loves the color pink so much, that he is even nicknamed “Pinky”. He has got pink stuffed animals, rides a pink bike, and his best friend Rex is a girl, reasons why he is constantly bullied by an older boy at school. There is a moment when he even thinks about changing his name back to Billy; but thanks to an old neighbor he understands how important it is to be yourself no matter what the others think. In the end he goes back to being Pinky and is able to confront his bully with lots of
Second thoughts: There are many boys who love or would love the color pink if it carried no silly prejudices. In my view, much of the blame for this color nonsense lies on publicity and marketing campaigns which keep manifesting that pink is only a girls' color. We only have to enter any toy store to see real proof of how shelves are split into boys' and girls' things, with the correspondent blue and pink toys respectively. Thus, it is hard for boys to accept this shade as one more possibility in their world. Books such as Pinky and Rex and the Bully, which belongs to a series of books with the same protagonists, will make any boy who likes pink feel comfortable and confident with his tastes. If used with the appropriate guidance in the classroom, it will also teach other boys and girls about the importance of staying true to yourself as regards tastes, choices, etc, while presenting different ways of being a real boy.

- **Prince Cinders** (1997) by Babette Cole

  Summary: Prince Cinders does not fit into what a regular prince “should look” like at all, because he is skinny, spotty and small. As a consequence, he is forced to do all the housework that his brothers do not like such as cleaning, ironing, or tidying up, while they keep making fun of Cinder's looks. One day while his big hairy brothers are out partying, a fairy appears to help Cinders, but being a little inexperienced herself, she actually makes it worse as Prince Cinders is turned into a big and hairy monster. Fortunately,
the spell does not let him see his new horrible looks and so he goes to a party. Being too big to get in, he decides to go back home when he meets a princess at the bus stop. While she is talking to him, Cinders suddenly goes back to normal making the princess believe Cinders has saved her from the ugly huge monkey. Being shy, Prince Cinders runs away leaving his pants behind. The Princess looks for the owner of the pants all around until he finally meets Prince Cinders again. Eventually they get married and the three big hairy brothers are turned into house fairies thanks to a new spell from the fairy.

**Second thoughts:** This is another modern version of the well-known Cinderella story. In this case the idea is turned upside down only by changing the protagonist's sex. It is great seeing masculine characters doing the housework or being the passive-shy ones for a change. This story can teach us how traditional masculinities, expressed by being strong, big or hairy, do not represent the only correct option for boys or men.

**2000 Onwards**

- **The Sissy Duckling** (2002) by Harvey Fierstein

  **Summary:** Elmer is a special duckling as his mother calls him. He prefers building sand castles instead of forts, putting on puppet shows instead of playing football, or baking while the other ducks are boxing. Elmer does have different tastes from the other ducks which makes his father feel ashamed of him. Feeling bullied and teased the sissy duckling decides to leave home and
start a new life alone in the forest. When it is time for all the ducks to migrate, Elmer goes back to say goodbye to his parents just on time to see a hunter injure his father. As he runs to help him all the other ducks fly away scared. However, Elmer decides to stay and take care of his father until spring when all the other ducks come back. From that moment on, Elmer is treated as a hero.

Second thoughts: This story was written by popular actor Harvey Fierstein as another proof on how being different is just fine. It is basically another version of Andersen's *The Ugly Duckling* but with a twisted plot, as it is not the fact of being ugly that keeps Elmer out of the group, but having likes which do not correspond to the traditional masculinity tastes or choices expected by society. This story will teach boys that you can be a hero proud of yourself no matter what you like; and that your tastes do not make you less of a boy, a man, or a person. What is more, it will also help bullies realize that there is not one single correct masculinity to praise. Unfortunately, I have read many critiques regarding this story which define it as a gay-themed book. Even though the author is openly gay I do not see any reference to homosexuality in the book at all. As society tends to condemn certain kind of tastes for boys, we seem to accept that it is only homosexuals who may enjoy them. Both heterosexual and homosexual men, as well as boys whose sexuality has in most cases not been defined yet, should be able to enjoy or choose whatever they like not having a limited range of possibilities depending on their sex—or sexuality. Let us internalize that the fact a boy
likes pink, prefers art to sports, or does not enjoy wrestling does not make him more or less gay; it just makes him who he is, his unique self.

• **King and King (2002) by Linda De Haan and Stern Nijland**

  Summary: Young Prince Bertie is told off by his mother as she thinks it is about time for him to get married. He is introduced to lots of princesses who mean nothing to him until the last one appears accompanied by her brother. Surprisingly it is the prince, and not the princess, who catches Prince Bertie's attention. In the end, they get married and become King and King.

  **Second thoughts:** This book presents us with new types of families and modern fairy tales in which it is not just the-prince-needs-a-princess-to-fall-in-love-with-and-get-married-story. We are able to perceive homosexuality as another option among relationships which becomes accepted by everyone. There is a sequel of this story titled *King and King and Family* (2004), in which the protagonists adopt a girl. It is important for children to understand that there is not one correct way of being a man as regards expressing love or sexuality; this story will serve as a great opportunity to expand children's idea of what “being a man” is.

• **When the Bees Fly Home** (2002) by Andrea Cheng

  Summary: Jonathan is the son of a beekeeper. He is not as strong as he is supposed to be for a boy, fact which irritates his father, in particular since the family is going through a hard time in which his strength is much required.
Jonathan's mother spends many nights making wax candles to help the family, and one day Jonathan decorates some of them by adding motifs he has molded with wax. The candles he makes are so popular that they get many orders, which eventually makes his father feel proud of him.

**Second thoughts:** This time we are offered a boy who, although not being athletic or strong as males “should” be, succeeds in his life through art and sensitivity. Boys are hence offered new ways to express themselves, rather than being recognized only for their physical abilities or features. There are many boys who will see themselves mirrored in this plot, because there are many different ways of being a boy, or a man.


**Summary:** Herb is a boy who loves reading. However, the way he treats his books is not the most appropriate one. After doodling, cutting, and dropping some bread crumbs on one of his books he falls asleep to suddenly appear immersed in the stories of the book. All the characters are rather mad for having been treated so badly by him and thus want to teach the boy a lesson. Once he wakes up, Herb tries to fix all the mischief he had previously made in the book as soon as possible.

**Second thoughts:** The great point of this story is that the main character, who is a boy, loves reading; which should, but is often not, considered as a common circumstance. Boys are not encouraged to read as much as girls from their very early years, and they grow up thinking of it as a girls' thing.
Hence, providing a boy who visibly loves reading through children’s literature brings this activity nearer to boys. Our expectations on children are of great importance (see *The Pygmalion Effect* on p. 44), and if we tend to give out more books to girls than to boys as gifts, or just expect them not to read as much or as well “since they are boys”, what we are actually generating on them is a feeling of not being good enough at reading or of not being in need of it, which is absolutely wrong. We must break those barriers and approach reading as a universal advantage and a great pleasure for everybody, and this book will help us spread the word.

- **The Incredible Book Eating Boy** (2006) by Oliver Jeffers

  **Summary:** Henry loves books more than anything in the world but not as most people do, he loves them in a different way. Henry actually loves eating books, and the more he eats the smarter he seems to get. As time goes by, Henry develops a habit of swallowing books faster and faster until one day his stomach decides it cannot bear it any longer and so he ends up vomiting everything. Henry suddenly feels lost, empty, and ignorant without all the knowledge he had previously digested. He then decides to pick up a book and, for a change, starts reading it. The act of reading gives him both a better version than the one he had perceived by eating it, and makes for a more enjoyable time. From that moment on Henry becomes more and more intelligent, not by eating books but by reading them.

  **Second thoughts:** This is another story to encourage boys to read, to teach
them how reading books is as much a masculine hobby as a feminine one. The process Henry undergoes from first swallowing books, something we sometimes do in our schooling or university years, metaphorically speaking, to finally enjoying them is the correct step we should wish for our boys to follow.

- **The Different Dragon** (2006) by Jennifer Bryan
  
  **Summary**: Most dragons are usually fierce, dangerous and horrible; but this dragon does not display such an image at all. The dragon is actually the protagonist of the bedtime story that a boy, called Noah, is told by one of his two mothers.
  
  **Second thoughts**: Similar to The Purim Superhero, the topic of same sex parents is treated as an aside. Hence, a deep lesson of acceptance is given indirectly through the protagonist's family, and directly through the character of the dragon who does not want to stick to traditional stereotypes associated with his male gender.

- **Ballerino Nate** (2006) by Kimberly Brubaker Bradley
  
  **Summary**: One day Nate goes to a ballet performance and enjoys it so much that he decides he wants to be a ballet dancer. When his brother points out to him that dancing is just a girl's thing he feels disappointed. Nonetheless, his parents not only support him steadily, but his mother even takes him to a real theater where he can meet other male ballet dancers so as to encourage him to
continue pursuit his dream without any doubts.

**Second thoughts:** It is possible to view this story as a follow up of *Oliver Button is a Sissy*. It is to be highlighted, though, that for the first time both the protagonist's parents support a boy's love for dancing which makes of it a more equitable gender reaction than the other books in which it is usually just the mother who accompanies the boy to break the mold of “feminine” activities.

- **The Only Boy in Ballet Class** (2007) by Denise Eliana Gruska

  **Summary:** Tucker loves dancing more than anything in the world. From the moment he wakes up his feet can't stop moving, and once ballet class starts he feels like the happiest boy ever. As neither his family nor his schoolmates think dancing is appropriate for boys, he is constantly teased for it. One day when there is no other child available to participate, he is chosen last for a football game. His friends are amazed by how good he is, using his ballet skills to excel at football; he does so well he is finally accepted by them.

  **Second thoughts:** This book has a very similar plot to that of *Max* by Rachel Isadora. However, while there is no teasing or bullying as in *Max'*s story *The Only Boy in Ballet Class* does educate about respect and acceptance from others. It is not just a question of Tucker keeping his identity. As a matter of fact, there is nowhere in this book in which we feel that Tucker will ever stop seeking his greatest wish because of what others tell him or say. It has actually more to do with the rest of the society learning to approve other
people's differences, in particular those regarding gender, which provides a great lesson to use in our classrooms.

- **The Boy who Cried Fabulous** (2007) by Leslea Newman

  **Summary:** Roger loves the world and everything which surrounds it. For him everything is just “fabulous”! He is so eager to enjoy every single detail on his way to school, that he is always late. His parents are worried about his “fabulous manners” and ban him from using the word *fabulous*. Nonetheless, this does not keep him from enjoying every bit of life around him and as soon as his parents realize they will not be able to change him, they decide to accept him for who he is, and Roger can be a fabulous boy again.

  **Second thoughts:** This story is not about a boy simply expressing himself by wearing dresses, dancing, or dressing in pink, as many of the previously described plots. On this occasion, it is the manners and language he uses which are appointed indirectly as “feminine”, or at least as not appropriate for a boy. Once more, although sexuality is not introduced as a theme in this story, many adults or teenagers will assume Roger to be homosexual for his likes and attitudes. Can't boys express their feelings? Can't they enjoy the world and cry it out loud? Should they avoid using certain type of vocabulary? This book will teach us how any boy should be free to live fabulously if he wants to, without having to mold to society's demands on a precise masculinity type.
• *Little Zizi* (2008) by Thierry Lenain

**Summary:** Martin did have no problem with his small “peepee” until one of his schoolmates, the bully Adrian, referred to its size in the locker room making him object of an endless mockery at the school. On top of that, both Martin and the bully like the same girl, Anäis, so a peeing contest is arranged to see who will get the girl. Eventually, even though Martin did not succeed at it, Anaïs preferred him to the brute Martin.

**Second thoughts:** The author of this story wants to teach boys that having a bigger or a smaller “zizi” does not reflect one's manliness. The ironic thing is that children, even teens, would never think of size as such a big deal unless we adults told them so. Hence, I would not recommend this book to be used with young children as we run the risk of implying a new requirement to being “a real boy” or “a real man” which they had never thought of before — and which does not prove manliness at all. This added consideration would increase the pressure boys have for adjusting to the image that society demands for an “appropriate” masculinity, such as being big, muscular, strong, sporty, etc. Besides, the fact of setting up a contest to win a girl's approval through personal strength does not place either boys or girls in a very good position. Conversely traditional literature —and sometimes contemporary too— often displays beauty contests as a means to win boys' approvals in which external physical beauty is once more being displayed as an essential feature for girls to have, whereas strength arises as the appropriate condition for boys to desire. Thus, I would propose a debate on
these types of issues too, which if performed through some role play in which boys and girls had to interchange their roles, would amplify their views to what “being a girl” or “being a boy” means in our society.

- *Willy the Wimp* (2008) by Anthony Browne

**Summary:** Willy is a sensitive, nice, weak chimpanzee. There is a gang in the neighborhood where he lives which does not stop bullying him because of his wimpy character. One day he receives a package by mail; a book on how to be a hero and not a wimp anymore. Following the book's instructions he starts jogging, learns how to box, and follows a special banana diet, in order to turn into a huge strong new version of Willy. He is even able to save a friend of his, Milly, when she is attacked by the bullies. Nevertheless, in the end we learn that no matter his physical changes he continues being Willy the Wimp, which is just absolutely fine.

**Second thoughts:** Willy is happy being wimpy. Sadly, society's notion of the “ideal masculinity” matches more the bullies who attack him; strong, aggressive and powerful, than Willy's kind self. Willy seems to acknowledge this situation, reason why he makes a great effort to change himself into “a real manly chimpanzee”. Even though he goes as far as succeeding against the bullies we see how at the end he remains Willy the Wimp as he says “I'm sorry” when he collides with a lamppost. Anthony Browne is probably trying to teach us a great message about how boys do not need to change themselves to match any “true masculinity” because the best masculinity is their own
unique version.

• *10,000 Dresses* (2008) by Marcus Ewert

Summary: Bailey is constantly dreaming about dresses of all types; crystal dresses, dresses made of flowers, and many other magical dresses. However, when he wakes up and talks about his dreams both his parents tell him he should not be thinking about dresses, as that is not a boy's thing. One day he meets an older girl called Laurel who is fascinated by his love for dresses and a fabulous friendship grows between them; in Laurel, Bailey finds a soul mate with whom to freely share his true self.

*Second thoughts:* Many years ago girls were not supposed to wear trousers at all. In fact, any woman who did, was regarded as bizarre, queer or mad. Fortunately, time and women's efforts were able to change that silly prohibition. Why then should boys not be able to wear dresses or skirts? It is amazing how hard such a tiny change would be for us, but there will be a time when this fact will be considered ridiculous, the same as girls or women not being allowed to wear trousers—which by the way still remains prohibited as regards most school's uniforms, in which girls are only permitted to wear skirts. This book presents a boy who simply loves dresses, but is reprimanded for it by his parents as well as society. Once more this taste does not have to be connected to a particular sexual option, although it could be. This picturebook is likely to be used with teenagers to teach tolerance and respect for whatever is different from the norm, whether it has to do with physical features, material accessories or sexual preferences.
My Princess Boy (2010) by Cheryl Kilodavis

Summary: This book is about a boy who loves pink, enjoys wearing dresses and jewelry and could be dancing all day long. He is deeply loved and supported for who he is by both his parents and his brother. His schoolmates also love playing with him because he is a nice happy boy. Sometimes he worries when people point at him for being different, but his family reminds him that they just do not understand how special he is, so he goes back to being happy again.

Second thoughts: The author of this story, Mrs. Kilodavis, rejected the prejudices of raising a transgender boy who did not follow the model dictated by the traditional masculinity standards. Once she and her family were able to learn to accept the boy for who he was, she thought it was the community's turn to advance. This is what inspired Cheryl Kilodavis to write this book, as a means for other children to accept and love her “princess boy”. Nowadays she tours the USA teaching little children about acceptance and respect; and she has been thanked by many other “princess boys” who finally have found a book in which they could see themselves represented.

Christian the Hugging Lion (2010) by Justin Richardson

Summary: Friends John and Ace once bought a lion cub at a shop and took it home with them. They named him Christian, loved him, and were also loved by him as his real parents. When Christian got too big he had to go back to
the wild which meant a hard step for everyone in the family. When some years later they went back to visit him... he still remembered them!

**Second thoughts:** This book is based on a true story about two men who in 1969 acquired a lion cub at the shopping chain *Harrods* and took it home as a pet. They took care of him as their little “child” for many years until they were not able to maintain it anymore because of its size. Fortunately, a person offered to introduce Christian into the wilderness in Africa. A year later, when the two men decided to go to Kenya to see him, the lion was able to recognize them and hugged them one more time! This story could help us introduce other masculinities which vary from the most promoted regular type. This masculinity involves features such as paternal care, emotions, love, men living together as friends or as a couple, etc. There are few books in which men or boys are as emotional and kind as they are portrayed in this story, and it would be fantastic for a class to discover all those other possible options of masculinity.

- **Be Who you Are** (2010) By Jennifer Carr

  **Summary:** In this story the protagonist Nick, is born as a boy — or at least assigned this gender at birth— but feels like a girl inside. Although his parents learn to be rather supportive, things are not as easy at school and so his father decides to have an appointment with the teacher to explain what Nick is going through. They also work with a counselor to help Nick’s family and his community accept him the way she is.
Second thoughts: Being transgender is something much more common than we may believe. In Spain there seem to be very few cases because it is still a stigmatized situation which many people fail to understand. However in this present year 2015, several associations such as Arelas in Galicia or Chrysallis in Andalucía have made their appearance so as to demand rights for transgender or transexual children in our country too. In other places such as the USA, media exposure has grown throughout recent years, with a great deal of cases coming out. This book provides the perfect guide on how to act once you discover that one of your children is transgender by involving the whole community. It is a very useful book which will also teach us about different existing ways of being—or not being—a boy.

- **The Boy with Pink Hair** (2011) by Perez Hilton

  Summary: The protagonist of this story is a nameless boy who is only referred to as “the boy with pink hair”, which is basically the main difference between him and the rest. At his school we may also find “the boy with the bad attitude” who constantly bullies him. Opposite to this character is a girl who supports “the boy with pink hair” for who he is. The climax of the story takes place when there is some kind of problem at the school cafeteria and the boy with pink hair is able to fantastically organize and cook a meal for the whole school.

  Second thoughts: the fact that the main character of this book has got pink and not blue or green hair gives us a great opportunity to teach color
acceptance to boys—with everything that implies. Even though girls are nowadays constantly encouraged by all types of media to love pink, it is true that they are allowed to wear, use, or buy any type of color item. On the contrary, boys are told to abhor pink simply for its “feminine connotations”, hence associating anything regarded as feminine with negative or inferior terms. Needless to say, this idea is principally driven by marketing so that boys and girls will have to buy different types of toys, clothes, or accessories depending on their sex and hence, not be able to share them. After all, capitalism is highly interested in keeping binaries alive, especially in the infant world, due to its financial advantages. What is indisputably pathetic, is the way some scientists intend to biologically justify certain trends, like the attraction for a color, through experiments which can't be proved; practice which has been named as biological determinism.

In this story, the boy with pink hair not only likes pink, but happens to have been born pink-haired as well, which makes him different though never less of a boy. The exceptional feature this boy holds will allow us to teach a great lesson of acceptance which may be applied to other spheres such as gender-nonconforming children, or just boys who like some “feminine” things.

• **Benjamin and the Word** (2011) by Daniel Olivas

  **Summary:** One day while playing baseball with his friends Benjamin is called “a word” by one of them. It is not the first time he has heard this word and
knows that it is meant to hurt him. When his dad comes to pick him up he
notices something is wrong with Benjamin and the boy tells him about “the
word”.

Second thoughts: This story was probably written as an opportunity to fight
against bigotry and racism. The reason I have decided to include this book in
this list is because both the father of the story and his son Benjamin display
masculinities much different from the ordinary ones. The father hugs and
careses his son when he picks him up from school, talks to him, tries to
understand what he is going through and never invites him to use violence or
aggressiveness as a solution to his problems. I absolutely agree there should
be more books in which men and boys are seen showing and dealing with
emotions, without fear of being observed and judged by “society”. If little
boys were able to perceive this as normal there would be much more dialogue
between sons and fathers, or sons and mothers which would avoid many
infant and teen depressions, aggressive attitudes, and violence.

• One of a Kind Coloring Book (2012) by Genevieve Labelle

Summary: This books shows us different uncolored illustrations to be
completed with by children. We may see boys doing ballet, boys wearing
dresses or knights being afraid of spiders, among many others.

Second thoughts: While this book is not a narrative picturebook, I was
compelled to include it in my observations for its innovative approach to
gender stereotypes. It has even inspired me on producing a similar kind of
book to be delivered and worked with in the classrooms of our country. In addition, I would even advise picturebook authors to design some parts of the books in which children can intervene by coloring them.

* Roland Humprey *is* wearing a *What?* (2013) by Eileen Kiernan-Johnson

**Summary:** Roland does not understand the reason why he cannot wear pink or sparkly things. He thinks boys are limited in some ways, as girls can choose both sports and ballet but boys can only have it one way. Then comes the day when Roland decides to be true to himself, wear whatever he wants and only care for children who accept him as/for who he really is.

**Second thoughts:** This story is in the same vein as *My Princess Boy* or *The Boy with Pink Hair* among others. Once more, authors try to present certain outfits, accessories, or hues as belonging to the boys' world, even though society regards them as just feminine or girls' domain. The plot is rather similar in all of them; a boy is made to feel out of place for having certain tastes but in the end learns he must keep true to himself and be happy no matter what the rest of the people think. As an extra feature, the book is written in verse which makes it more fun for children to read.

* The Purim Superhero * (2013) by Elisabeth Kushner

**Summary:** It is the Purim holiday. Nate's friends are all wearing superhero dresses, but Nate wants to dress up as an alien. Both Nate's dads help him to find a solution.
Second thoughts: There are two very interesting facts about this book. First of all it is a distinctly Jewish perspective treating an LGBTQ\textsuperscript{31} topic in a picturebook. Second, the fact that both Nate’s parents are men is dealt with casually, hence not making it a book written specifically about alternative families. It remains as a story about a boy who simply happens to have two dads, but the fact never serves as a main subject in the plot which provides commonality to it.

• \textit{When Leonard Lost His Spots} (2013) by Monique Costa

Summary: Leonard is a leopard who has adopted a boy. After some time he finally realizes he has been born into the wrong body and so decides to come out and turn into Leona. This transition situation is rather shocking for his child who eventually learns to accept it, because whatever makes his parent happy makes him happy too.

Second thoughts: Thanks to this book we will be able to work on gender transition, and on how some people do not identify with the gender they were assigned to at the time they were born. As far as this situation may seem for some of our children or pupils, we cannot deny that the media brings us many cases of this kind which children should learn to understand, accept, and respect.

\textsuperscript{31} LGBTQ: It stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer. Often associated with social activism on behalf of these communities.
• *Jacob’s New Dress* (2014) by Sarah and Ian Hoffman

**Summary:** Jacob loves dressing up and one day decides he wants to wear a dress to school. He even asks his mother to make one that fits him. Fortunately for him, it takes his mother little time to realize that if it makes her son happy, it cannot be that “bad”. There is a bully at the school who does not stop making fun of Jacob's dress or his “feminine” likes. In the end even Jacob's dad supports him on his decision of wearing a dress to school which highly empowers the boy to be able to confront the bully Christopher.

**Second thoughts:** This is a very realistic plot, which shows how afraid we are of gender stereotypes and the stigma they may provoke on our children or pupils. What we must realize is that by not letting children be their true selves we are actually teaching them a wrong lesson. The reason Christopher continuously bullied Jacob had more to do with his father's way of being than with his; after all Christopher is just a child who follows adults' models and society's rules. Accordingly, this book will be very helpful to teach tolerance towards children who are not gender-conforming. By showing parents and teachers support towards different likes and tastes, where different does not mean “bad” just “not alike”, we will not only be aiding gender-non conforming boys or girls, but infancy in general.

• *Meet Polkadot* (2014) by Talcott Broadhead

**Summary:** The protagonist of this book Polkadot is a transgender child; but above all is presented as a person, as an individual. Thanks to the
conversations between Polkadot and her sister Gladiola, we are able to learn many things about what gender means, and how cisgender people react to its expression on those occasions in which it does not conform to expectations.

**Second thoughts:** This kind of books should not only be read by those families with transgender children — just the same as those books in which a child with some type of disability is portrayed should not only be read by families in which there is a child on a wheelchair, for instance. This book offers a great lesson on the fluidity of gender labels; about how there is not one correct definition of boy or girl. It is very advisable to use this book in schools so as to teach tolerance among our youngsters.

- *Morris Micklewhite and the Tangerine Dress* (2014) by Christine Baldacchino

**Summary:** Morris is a very imaginative boy who loves wearing a tangerine dress. As his teachers and classmates think this is not a boys' thing, he is continuously mocked at school. One day he feels so devastated by all that pressure that his mum lets him stay at home, and he falls asleep dreaming about a great adventure in space accompanied by his cat Moo. He later paints this story and takes it to school where everybody is amazed by his creative skills.

**Second thoughts:** Imagination, creativity, or just being different are values which rigid societies do not tend to take into consideration at all. What is more, if that creativity is besides focused on something which does not
belong to what is supposed to be appropriate for one's gender, it may even be regarded as a problem. This story shows how not following society's rules should sometimes be accepted or even encouraged depending on the case.

- **Made by Raffi** (2014) by Craig Pomraz

  **Summary:** Raffi is a boy who does not like typical boy activities; he does love knitting though, which his friends consider as a girl's pass time. At the time of the school pageant there is no costume for the prince and Raffi proposes making a cape for him. The end of the pageant arrives and Raffi becomes the star of the festival thanks to his cape.

  **Second thoughts:** Once more we may see how silly it is to link certain type of activities to one or another sex. The fact that Raffi likes knitting does not have to influence his gender identity or sexuality at all. This book will comfort all those boys who like things that are usually regarded as girls' things and will also help parents overcome their fears in letting them carry out certain activities.

- **I Am Jazz** (2015) by Jessica Herthel and Jazz Jennings

  **Summary:** This is the story of a “girl's brain born into a boy's body”. Jazz knew she was a girl and not a boy from the moment she was born. At first, it was a difficult situation for her parents to embrace but with the passage of time they learned to accept it.

  **Second thoughts:** Another story featuring a transgender protagonist, the best
characteristic of this story is that it is based on true facts. Indeed, Jazz Jennings has become a type of Trans star in the USA and she has just starred in a reality television series called “All that Jazz” which has been well received. Through this book children will learn about the fluidity of gender and gender expression through the voice of a transgender child.

4.9. Conclusion

Picturebooks are still a rather unknown world for many people. Even trained educators are not conscious of the extraordinary potential this tool has for helping and connecting to young people. Hopefully with greater understanding about the power of the picturebook, teachers and students of all ages will become more consciously aware of the unity of the experiences in our written world so that when we use the word 'reading' we always mean reading the world and never simply the word (Janet Evans, What's in the Picture? Foreword xii). In literature including picturebooks men are starting to appear in the domestic arena with the subsequent critiques: “These representations of male domesticity and fatherhood with their highly appropriated feminine imagery, may be interpreted as signifying a diminished masculinity and thus add further evidence of a 'crisis of masculinity'” (“Picturing the Male” 23). Yet men and boys are in need of a redefinition of their portrayals in picturebooks, so “rather than mourn the loss of an authentic, unchanging masculinity… [acknowledge that] masculinity, like patriarchy is always in process and subject to amendment” (16).

Sandra L. Beckett warns us how: “Children's literature, in its various
manifestations, offer children a vast repertoire of ways of being human to choose from, to play with, to celebrate” (13), and we should be celebrating that there are no two equal boys or two equal men, but that each of them will bear their own unique masculinity.

Professor May M. Narahara paraphrases Turner-Bowker words in saying that:

Books are the medium used to teach the social studies framework providing children access to learning cultural, geographical, ethical, historical and cultural literacy.[...] Through illustrations and language books define standards for masculine and feminine behavior. Books provide role models for children. (4)

If it is this true that books provide role models for children, let us be careful not only as to which kind of models we provide but on those which are missing. Boys are in an urgent need of new models from children's literature in which to see themselves reflected.
CHAPTER 5. MY PICTUREBOOK. Martin Is the Best

As it has been revealed in the introduction of this thesis the fifth chapter will involve putting into practice all the theory as regards gender, masculinities, children's literature and picturebooks discussed in the four previous chapters so as to produce a work in which boy's gender stereotypes will be met and questioned. I will hereabouts attempt to explain how I concluded in using certain techniques at the time of producing the images and words of this book. Illustrations and text will sometimes work together, but each of these two components may also provide different information in some of the scenes. Accordingly, this picturebook will demand many
fun readings and previous training from the side of the reader to be able to enjoy all the numerous details it will contain.

5.1. The plot of the story

After having meticulously analyzed numerous essays based on picturebooks theory, I will devote this chapter to scrutinizing the work I have produced. As regards the illustrations these have been produced by experienced illustrators, who have neatly followed my instructions as regards the portrayals of the images. Prior to detailing each different part of the book making use of the proper theoretical tools and vocabulary, I will proceed to contextualize the story by relating the plot so as to provide the necessary information to the reader.

5.1.1. Summary of Martin Is the Best

This story is about a boy named Martin who does not like to perform “typically male or masculine” activities. Instead, Martin—who is sensitive, artistic and caring—loves reading, drawing, coloring, singing and dancing. This does not mean he is worse, less of a boy or less human than the other boys; he is just his own unique self. Throughout the plot we will see how Martin is encouraged by his dad to carry out every kind of possible “masculine” tasks with no success. At the same time, the protagonist of the story is unstoppably mocked by his younger sister Mia who, to make things worse, does love those same activities Martin cannot stand. Nonetheless, Martin's dad is not disturbed at all by Mia's tastes—in spite of her being a girl—which will give us a hint on how Martin's dad perceives whatever is related to the “masculine” world as superior to any other activity which might be considered as
Two other characters complete the family picture: Mum, and Oliver, the baby brother, who is still too young to talk or walk. Opposed to Dad, Mum fully supports Martin's tastes just in exactly the same way as she respects Mia's love for football or video games. The climax of the story takes place at the school's end of the year festival. Martin's sister, Mia, is awarded a prize at the festival and immediately Dad looks at him showing disapproval and reproach. While tears are about to come from Martin's eyes, a voice-over announces that he has been awarded the school's most prestigious prize, which is delivered for being the best at many different things: the best at reading, the best in art class, the best peer-helper, the best at drama and the best classmate. That is the moment when Dad realizes how silly he has been, and immediately expresses his love and apologies to Martin.

5.1.2. Second thoughts

*Martin Is the Best* teaches boys to accept their true selves, no matter what their peers may think, because it has been proven that by being themselves people will always succeed in life. At the same time, this story is forwarding a message of respect and tolerance to all those other boys and girls who may encounter a similar situation in their real lives with mates, siblings, friends, relatives, or acquaintances. This story will teach them that there is not one unique way of being a boy, and how one may succeed respecting his own differences.
5.2. The making-off phase

5.2.1. The characters

There are five characters who take part in this picturebook. Martin, Mia, Dad, Oliver and Mum. They are the five members of a family. You may see them on the following Figure 29.

- **Martin**: The protagonist of this picturebook is a boy named Martin who is about eight years old. He loves drawing, dancing, painting, and singing. Martin is not a typical active boy, but this is no problem for him. He is a good friend to have, sensible and caring. This is the way he looks:
• **Mia, Martin's sister:** Most of the dialogue in this picturebook will be conducted by Mia and Dad. The reason I have chosen a girl and not a boy to interpret Mia's character has absolutely been accomplished on purpose. Mia's role in the story is not that of a sweet, passive, naturally feminine girl. She is about two years younger than Martin, but shows a very confident, stubborn, and competitive character, much more typical or admitted in boys. Mia is not very nice either to her older brother throughout the story. Martin's sister knows she is the apple of her father's eye and does everything in her hands to please him. She is a very active girl who loves sports and competition. This is what she looks like:
Oliver: Oliver is Martin's baby brother. He is less than one year and so cannot talk or walk properly yet. He truly loves his brother Martin and likes spending time around him being foolish. Baby Oliver looks like this:
• **Dad, Martin's father:** This character is represented by a modern man. A forty-something-year-old dad who likes spending time with his family. We may see how this character fully portrays the typical 21st century type of masculinity: a man who feels in need of getting more involved with the family life than the previous generations of fathers, but still has a fixed idea about what being a man or a woman, a boy or a girl means — with all the possible connotations these terms imply. The fact his daughter Mia loves “masculine” activities does not only seem not to bother him at all, but he even goes as far as encouraging them, considering that by doing so he is actually fulfilling a present-day feminist type of paternity. What he cannot bear is Martin not taking part in all those activities he loves, and what is worse, seeing how the ones he enjoys often belong to the feminist sphere. This is what Dad looks
• **Mum, Martin's brother**: In spite of being the quietest character of the whole story, she is one of the most important ones. The way she looks, acts, and behaves confers much more information than the rest of the characters, this being the reason why she does not need to pronounce a word to tell us many different things. Also in her forties, Mum is a modern woman who works as an architect. She is sporty, and likes cycling as well as football. Mum also enjoys do-it-yourself projects, and hence appears in an image of the picturebook painting the garage on her own. She knows
her three children, and supports their selves and their tastes in a very tolerant open way. Mum agrees with Mia loving football, playing with the game console or competing, because that is what she loves; she also thinks it is great that Martin enjoys drawing, painting, playing music or dancing, and strongly encourages him to take up those activities he finds amusing. The following figure is what Mum looks like:

Figure 34: Portrait of Mum
5.2.2. The layout

The first task involved in the physical creation process is to decide on the layout of your picturebook. How many pages will it have? Will it include illustrations on double-pages? Will the illustrations “bleed” to the end of the page or will they be framed so as to imply some kind of feeling, emotion? These are the type of questions one has to find answers to at the time of designing the layout of a picturebook. In *Martin Is the Best* I will follow a routine as regards the layout of the story. The first scene in which the context is displayed will take up two pages which will bleed to the borders. In this scene we will see the family performing some kind of activity. The next two pages will represent two different settings in a separate way. The verso, i.e. the left page, will be occupied by Mia and Dad demanding Martin to do something, whereas the recto, i.e. the right page, will show us Martin in his world, doing something totally different from what he is being asked. There are seven scenarios, one for each day of the week, seven with Mia and Dad, and seven of Martin's world situations. See here below the layout diagram in Figure 35:
5.2.3. Parts of the picturebook

5.2.3.1. The Dust Jacket

No dust jacket will be made for this book due to financial considerations. However if demanded I would definitely not include a simple copy of the cover but a different yet complementary image. This way, the owner of the book would surely be more careful with it, as it would never be considered just as a protective cover but another praiseworthy component of the book itself.

5.2.3.2. The Cover

The cover of the book may be published in two different formats: hardcover
or paperback option. As this picturebook has been written with the intention of being published, and not only as the outcome of this doctoral thesis, the paperback option is likely to be the one chosen by the publishers for economic considerations.

A continuous illustration will be used for the front and back covers to bind the story figuratively as well as physically.

5.2.3.3. The Endpapers

In many picturebooks endpapers are not granted the importance they should have. A front endpaper is a window to what the story will be about, an invitation to think about a certain pattern, certain shades, or certain drawings. It provides the reader content to be searched for throughout the book, clues to what the plot will tell us, motivation to imagine the possible relation between this component and the rest of the book, etc. As with the story, each reader will provide a different significance to each endpaper, but naturally none of these possible interpretations will be more or less correct than another, including that of the author. As Perry Nodelman affirms: “all pictures require some interpretation, simply because no picture contains as much visual information as the object it depicts might actually convey” (Words about Pictures 11).

In Martin Is the Best I have chosen different endpapers for the beginning and the end of the book related to the change which takes place as regards Martin and his particular world. Both front and back end-pages will display drawings of trophies arranged diagonally with the words “the best” printed on them. The front endpaper will show a pattern on the trophies using two often symbolic colors as
regards gender: blue and pink. Whereas the back endpaper will navigate among all
the possible shades of the rainbow, denoting how boys should be allowed to have
their unique world apart from binaries; and to remind the reader how differences are
actually part of our universe, and thus should be accepted and respected. It also
implies a wink to the LGBTQ world and their iconic use of the rainbow.

5.2.3.4. The Back Cover

As mentioned in the cover section the back cover will be a continuum of the
front cover, as such the analysis is unchanged.

5.3. The story line

I will hereabouts provide not only the actual words which will be presented in
the book to be read, but those ideas, clues, and details which will help us connect the
characters to certain emotions, transmit specific values to the reader, and above all
help the illustrator —not being the same person as the writer— display all the
information I want to express in this picturebook.

For all this knowledge to be understood by the readers of this thesis I have
clearly marked elements of dialogue, context, or narrator's text with different colors
in the following script. Accordingly, blue will be used for narrator's text, red will be
used for dialogue, whereas all the extra information as regards feelings, drawings,
movements, etc will remain in black. I have also designated each scene as a. b. c., in
correspondence with the layout.
• **Story line:**

1a. Monday. It's sunny outside. Dad, Mia, and Mum are playing football.  
(Text on illustration)

1.b. *Come here Martin, shoot with us!* (Dad shouts, on the illustration)  
*Martin is a sissy!* (Chants his sister next to dad)

1.c. *But Martin prefers reading a book.* (*William's Doll* illustration on the cover)  
Oliver is crawling after a small football in a corner of the picture.

2.a. Tuesday. It's cloudy. They are cycling today. (Text on illustration)

2.b. *Come on Martin, up the hill!* (Dad says, he is carrying the picnic basket)  
*Martin will be last.* (His sister sings, looking backwards while riding her bike)  
Mum is also bike riding wearing a not too feminine sporty outfit, carrying Oliver in a typical bicycle child-seat. She is actually the fastest of all.

2.c. *But Martin* (stops half the way to sit down) *prefers drawing the beautiful landscape.* (*We may see the name of Picasso on the cover of his sketchbook).  
We can see all the family far away up the hill already.
3.a. Wednesday. It's raining. They are staying at home today. (Text on illustration)
Dad and Mia are playing with the motor racing set the children were given for Christmas.

3.b. Come on Martin, get your car and come here! (Dad shouts)
Martin is a momma's boy. (Mia sings)

3.c. But Martin prefers designing on the computer. He is with his mum in the study, while Oliver giggles clapping his hands (architect design on screen). We may observe the *Billy Eliot* film on a shelf next to a *Superman* poster. The design tells us that Martin's mum is probably an architect.

4.a. Thursday. It is still raining. They are staying at home again. (Text on illustration)
Dad and sister are playing a fighting game with the game console.

4.b. Come on Martin, try beating your sis! (Dad says looking at the T.V. set)
Martin is a girl... (Mia says this while sticking out her tongue. This is an unbelievable comment to be made from a girl. She uses a contemptuous tone to humiliate Martin by calling him a girl, meaning that this is an inferior or worse state for a person.
4.c. But Martin prefers helping Mum by making Oliver laugh (entertaining Oliver while she changes his diaper, making him laugh by wearing Mum's high-heel shoes. Oliver laughs and Mum does too)

I have chosen to display Mum taking care of Oliver to represent that being a modern woman or a feminist, does not mean rejecting certain activities. For example, I do not want women to stop taking care of children, I just want men to reciprocate so that conciliation does not mean hiring another woman to help Mum.

5.a. Friday. It's sunny at last! (Text on illustration)
Dad and Mia are washing Dad's car.

5.b. Come on Martin! I'll give you 10 Euros if you help. (Dad says)
Martin is a wimp! (Mocks his sister, who has a ten Euro note in her pocket).

5.c. But Martin prefers helping mum paint the garage for no money. (He has drawn Frida Kahlo in the same grey color his mum is using. Martin is wearing a t-shirt with a picture of Willy the Wimp by Anthony Browne; Mum is wearing loose overalls, no feminine look. Oliver is painting Frida's well-known eyebrow in pink.

6.a. Saturday. It's very cold outside. Dad, Mia and Mum are watching (football on) T.V. (while eating popcorn). There is popcorn all over the floor
where Oliver sits, also a book of *Piggy Book* by Anthony Browne.

6.b. **Come on Martin, come here and learn how to play!** (Dad shouts)

   *Martin can't play football* (Mia)

6.c. **But Martin prefers playing his favorite instrument, the flute.**

   (Meanwhile lots of rats are coming from behind his bed like zombies.
   Oliver loves listening to Martin. He is playing a little flute toy too)

7.a. **Sunday. It's the school's end of the year festival.** Martin, Mum, and Dad with Oliver on his legs are sitting down; there is an empty seat next to them.

7.b. **Come on Martin. Look at the trophy your sis got!** (Dad)

   *Martin is a loser...* (Mia)

7.c. **And this year's school festival winner is.... Martin! For being the best at so many things!** (This text may come from a presenter. Martin appears holding a trophy and a certificate which says: the best at reading, the best in art class, the best peer-helper, the best at drama, the best classmate, THE BEST KID AT SCHOOL!)

8.a. Mum and Oliver clap proudly, his dad looks surprised and his sister holding a smaller trophy is amazed too.
8.b. Last picture: Dad hugging Martin and saying

_Sorry Martin, you really are the best son for me!_

(Oliver crying behind and saying... _Me???)_

**5.4. Different picturebooks techniques used**

**5.4.1. Intertextuality**

Even though it has been previously defined I want to make reference to it again through Kathy Short's words: “Typically, intertextuality is defined as the connection students make between pieces of written literature” (“Literacy as a Collaborative Experience”). I have already alluded to this technique in chapter 4 (see p. 155) and I absolutely knew I wanted to make use of it in _Martin Is the Best_, in particular after having observed it magnificently applied throughout Anthony Browne's works. In this book I have used it in several scenes:

- In the first scene I have included the cover art from _William's Doll_ to allude to the existence of many different masculinities, such as the one exposed by the protagonist who loves reading instead of competing in sports, or playing the flute instead of watching football.

- In the second scene we will be able to see the title of Picasso on Martin’s sketch book cover, which will remind us how much Martin loves art and drawing.

- In the third scene there is a film, _Billy Elliot_, on a shelf of the study where we see Martin working with his mum on the computer. This film introduces us to a boy who loves dancing and will achieve his objective no matter the difficult
circumstances which surround him. Next to the shelf we can see a poster of Superman which balances Billy's masculinity with the hegemonic type: muscular, strong, big, superhero, powerful, etc.

- In the fifth scene we are presented with two different intertextual allusions. Firstly, Frida Kahlo's drawing is a gesture of admiration to this artist, active feminist of her time. Secondly, Anthony Browne could not fail to appear in this book represented here by his work *Willy the Wimp*, which tells the story of a chimpanzee that tries to change his masculinity only to conclude realizing that he cannot and should not change his personality, because that is the way he is.

- Author Anthony Browne reappears in the next scene with *The Piggy Book*, with those boys and dad who did not contribute to the housework until mum left the house, which was the same moment they started to transform into real pigs.

- *The Pied Piper of Hamelin* makes appearance in the sixth scene —with all those rats following him after— to culminate the intertextualities mentioned in *Martin Is the Best*. This very last intertextual reference was used to criticize how most men and boys sometimes follow a common trend of masculinity, in spite of the fact they do not like it or support it; represented by the rats following Martin.

5.4.2. Frames

Not only illustrations are crucial in a picturebook, but the manner of their
presentation conveys vital information as well. Nodelman adds to this matter that:

> to begin with, a frame around a picture makes it seem tidier, less energetic … Furthermore, looking at events through strictly defined boundaries implies detachment and objectivity, for the world we see through a frame is separate from our own world, marked off for us to look at. (Words about Pictures 50)

I have decided not to include frames on Martin Is the Best for aesthetic reasons. As the background is generally blank, I did not believe frames would provide additional value or improve the pictures. Nevertheless, I have decided to adhere to a double page for the introduction of the family scene, whereas single pages will display Martin's world scenes and Dad/Mia scenes, respectively. Nodelman also adds as regards white space that: “while white space around a picture can act as a frame, create a sense of constraint, and demand detachment, it can also do just the opposite; it can provide a focus that demands our involvement (Words about Pictures 53)” In Martin Is the Best there is a continuos white background which I personally consider would make any frame break the flow of the story.

See here below figures 36 and 37 in which both type of scenes will be displayed.
Figure 36: Double page scene of the family

Figure 37: Two single pages displaying two different scenes
5.4.3. Story within a story

Oliver's story represents another story within the main plot. Readers of *Martin Is the Best* will quickly learn to look for him in the images in a wish to see what he is doing. He appears eating popcorn, painting a Frida Kahlo style eyebrow, playing a little flute, clapping, etc. I will refer the reader back to page 155 to examine the non-textual narrative, its uses and objectives.

5.5. Conclusion

As Peter Hunt says, “children's texts should be mind-expanding and developmental; texts should be open, should confront, not confirm” (*Criticism, Theory and Children's Literature* 33). I surely want *Martin Is the Best* to confront educators, pupils, and parents, so as to initiate a debate on what it means to be a boy. I wish for this picturebook to raise awareness as to how they—as adults—do actually help or deny boys development of their own true boyhoods and masculinities.

If we do not help boys expand as unique individuals, assuring that their sex limits then in some way, we will indeed be creating inflexible and intolerant beings, as Perry Nodelman remarks:

> The more we believe that children are limited in various ways the more we deprive them of experiences that might take them less limited […] Deprived of the experience of anything more than the little we believe them capable of, children often learn to be inflexible, intolerant of the complex and the unconventional. (qtd. in Azevedo, *Introduction*)
Martin Is the Best will help boys feel comfortable with new types of masculinities such as the ones displayed throughout this book. The use of non-gender stereotyped books like this will invite tolerance and expansive thinking to come into our classrooms and our lives.
6. CONCLUSIONS

These last four years have caused a lasting development in my understanding and approaching of education, child-raising, and gender. I would have never thought that the path of a thesis could imply such a huge change on a personal level, but I could not feel more proud and fulfilled of what this investigation has helped me conquered. This may be related to the fact that I have internalized the lessons of my investigation into my persona, applying them to my present life as a teacher, as a mother and as a recent entrepreneur. From the moment I started this investigation I was sure I wanted to become seriously involved in applying the principles I was researching, as I felt much was needed to be accomplished.

It is difficult to write a conclusion about a subject in which you feel still leaves much unresolved. Hence, the main conclusion I must share is that this investigation has just meant a beginning and not at all the end, since it has served as a starting point for me, on a much bigger and longer objective. As a matter of fact, I am glad to say this work has already sparked an educative project meant to address gender stereotypes from an updated, different, and fresh perspective, in which boys and men need to be included as well.

All those hundreds hours of reading, thinking, and writing have served me to reconcile myself with what gender means, and how it may affect my daily teaching practice and my life as a new mother. This investigation has also taught me how rare it is for boys to be offered any models other than a singular hegemonic masculinity from which to choose, which presents many negative points embedded in — feeling of superiority regarding “femininity”, need of being the best at everything, demand
of leadership, lack of emotions, etc.

Teachers are charged with the wellbeing and future of their communities—no matter how much this is ignored—and their power can either be well or poorly employed, depending on their training as educators and their personal vocational involvement in their mission. Inside this educational sphere children's literature stands as a supreme tool that when badly managed by parents or teachers may provoke devastating social and emotional consequences. Accordingly, it is of extreme importance that we remain conscious of our actions as educators regarding how gender, and more specifically masculinities, are managed and transmitted. The issue this dissertation is trying to prove is that gender stereotyping may be unconsciously transmitted from incredibly young ages, and as a result children's literature may be used as an agent to access children so as to prevent boy gender stereotypes; this genre has tremendous power which should not be neglected.

I always knew I wanted to enjoy the path and not just the culmination of this investigation, and I believe I have. The path of my inquiry has led me to attend congresses at universities from three different countries, where I have shared my work at conferences related to gender, education, or children's literature. I have been invited to write for well-known online platforms in the education world such as Tiching\textsuperscript{32} where I have written an article on how unconscious sexism may exist in our classroom (“¿Somos Sexistas?\textsuperscript{33}”), and a series of articles dealing with creativity and education (“Creatividad en el Aula”\textsuperscript{34}). A blog about leadership titled \textit{Actitud

\textsuperscript{32} www.tiching.com
\textsuperscript{33} “¿Somos Sexistas en nuestra Aula de Manera Inconsciente?” http://blog.tiching.com/somos-sexistas-en-nuestra-aula-de-maneira-inconsciente/
\textsuperscript{34} “Creatividad en el Aula (I)”: http://blog.tiching.com/creatividad-en-el-aula-parte-i/
Manager also asked me to contribute with an article in March 2015\textsuperscript{35}, opportunity which I took for opening debate on feminist leadership, using a great deal of knowledge from chapter 1.

Nevertheless, seeing the end of my thesis approach I still felt the need to focus on the birth of a lasting project capable of sharing with the community all the lessons I had hitherto acquired along with all the things that could be done to improve the exposed situation I started attending different congresses on entrepreneurship, many networking events from which to learn how to grow a brand and meet people, and even took a course on oratory so as to improve my skills on delivering the message I was so devoted to share with the world. In February 2015 I entered an oratory contest for the first time. Competing against many lawyers armed with eloquent strategies, I delivered a speech entitled “Why Feminism Is also a Men's Issue”\textsuperscript{36}, and was rewarded with first place at the University of Santiago de Compostela. I would have never spoken about such a topic had it not been for this doctoral thesis.

This is mainly the path on how in March 2015, my latest project Realkiddys\textsuperscript{37} came to light. Realkiddys is an educational project which fully derives from this same investigation and where I devote myself to starting debate as regards gender, maternity, paternity, education and gender in children's literature. I have meant it as a way of reaching the general public using a light tone to stir in them a feeling of uneasiness and confusion in the short term, and activism for a much needed change in the long term. I can assure there are many things we are doing wrong as parents.

\textsuperscript{35} “Liderazgo en femenino”: http://actitudmanager.com/2015/03/11/liderar-en-femenino/
\textsuperscript{36} “Porque el feminismo también es cosa de hombres”: https://youtu.be/FCwXOUFAGt8
\textsuperscript{37} Realkiddys: www.realkiddys.com
and teachers in relation to the gender sphere, although most of the times it is just a question of plain ignorance and little training. Realkiddys is my platform for transmitting all the information that thanks to this investigation I can now assure I count with, and which I know will help many people in the future.

It is rather difficult to approach certain spheres when you do not have enough proofs, sufficient documentation, or objective data. However, these last four years have granted me with much of the information I needed to be able to address the world and tell them not only what it is we are doing wrong, but what we can do to ameliorate it. On the Realkiddys platform I produce weekly posts to be later shared through many different social networks: Facebook, Facebook page, Twitter, Linkedin, Pinterest, Instagram, Youtube, etc. This project evolved into much harder work and effort than I had originally expected, but in a few months I am glad to say I have started to see some interesting results. People are writing to tell me how they “had never thought about feminism, paternity, conciliation, or boys and girls differences the way I present them, and how through the reading of my experiences, examples, and close details they felt the need to do something so as to change their actions. Thanks to my Realkiddys blog I have been contacted by several councils to provide training to teenagers and university students on gender topics, as they thought my profile and knowledge was adequate for this type of functions, which would had never been that way without this investigation.

The most important and popular event related to this research I have taken part in was a TEDTalk. The TEDxGalicia conference took place on September 19

---

38 Tedxtalks are local events on which to share ideas that affect specific communities. In Galicia (Spain) these conferences have been held since 2010, being TedxGalicia 2015 the one I took part in.
2015; there I was invited to elaborate on my educational project *Realkiddys*. The video of this presentation may be seen on Youtube: Tedxtalks.\(^{39}\)

Even though at the beginning of this investigation I had planned on one more chapter to be included—which dealt with responses from several classrooms to the picturebook *Martin Is the Best*—as the investigation became more arduous I could see that this field study would stand as another dissertation on its own. Accordingly, I aim to complete a future study over the book created for this thesis, to be carried out at several primary schools in Galicia.

All the articles, events, actions, and products which have been originated from this doctoral thesis lead me to conclude that there is still a long way for boys to feel free in their preferences and decisions concerning their lives, without being constrained by a certain masculinity demanded to be performed by society. Children's literature conforms one of the most precious means in teaching children and adults about the acceptance of the limitless possibilities of being a boy, and the richness of being a unique person no matter your sex or gender.

Hopefully, with a wide promotion and proper use of books such as *Martin Is the Best* society will be able to understand that labels do not favor anyone, and that boys must be let free to be their true selves, so as to live as happy human beings.

\(^{39}\) Link of TedxGalicia talk: https://youtu.be/DEEvonZQEW4
List of figures

Figure 1: The Contorsionist from Homocircus by Rafa Soto 23
Figure 2: The Genderbread Person v3 by Sam Killerman 30
Figure 3: Chart found at Jo Paoletti's website Gender Mystique 39
Figure 4: Image from Jo Paoletti's website Gender Mystique 40
Figure 5: Image of Franklin D. Roosevelt found on the Gender Mystique 41
Figure 6: Cover from 2013 Peter Pan release 42
Figure 7: Image from 2013 Peter Pan film release 42
Figure 8: Image from 2015 Twinkerbell 43
Figure 9: Pie from Goldieblox website 43
Figure 10: Original neutral cartoon image of Dora 46
Figure 11: Cartoon image of Dora as a teenager 46
Figure 12: Lego Friends toy set 48
Figure 13: Lego ad campaign criticism 49
Figure 14: Lego supposedly gender neutral ad 50
Figure 15: Image of non-poseable doll turned into a poseable one 52
Figure 16: Skipper doll from 1975 53
Figure 17: Ginger doll from 2002 53
Figure 18: Image of the G8 Summit of 2014 67
Figure 19: Image from article about hazing 72
Figure 20: Comparison between the original and modern Superman 106
Figure 21: Image of the band *Spandau Ballet* 108
Figure 22: Image of the band *Guns N' Roses* 108
Figure 23: Image from the “Asch Conformity Experiment” 136
Figure 24: The original Merida on the left, makeover Merida on the right 152
Figure 25: Cover of *Morris Micklewhite and the Tangerine Dress* 169
Figure 26: Dust jacket of *Fudge Pancake Tacos* 170
Figure 27: Endpages of *Where the Wild Things Are* 171
Figure 28: Dedication and title page of *Orange Pear Apple Bear* 171
Figure 29: Portrait of Martin's family 217
Figure 30: Portrait of Martin, the protagonist of *Martin Is the Best* 218
Figure 31: Portrait of Mia, Martin's sister 219
Figure 32: Portrait of Oliver, Martin's baby brother 220
Figure 33: Portrait of Dad 221
Figure 34: Portrait of Mum 222
Figure 35: Layout of *Martin Is the Best* 224
Figure 36: Double page scene of the family 234
Figure 37: Two single pages displaying two different scenes 234
Appendixes

Appendix 1: Questionnaire from the Bem Sex Role Inventory
Appendix 1: Questionnaire from the Bem Sex Role Inventory

BEM SEX ROLE INVENTORY

The Bem Sex Role Inventory was developed in 1971 by Dr. Sandra Lipsitz Bem. It characterizes your personality as masculine, feminine, androgynous, or undifferentiated. The BSRI is based on gender stereotypes, so what it's actually measuring is how well you fit into your traditional sex role. Thus, your score may say as much about how our cultural expectations have changed over the last 35 years as it does about your personality.

Rate yourself on each item, on a scale from 1 (never or almost never true) to 7 (almost always true), then press the button.

1. self reliant
   Never Rarely Neutral Often Always

2. yielding
   Never Rarely Neutral Often Always

3. helpful
   Never Rarely Neutral Often Always

4. defends own beliefs
   Never Rarely Neutral Often Always

5. cheerful
   Never Rarely Neutral Often Always

6. moody
   Never Rarely Neutral Often Always

7. independent
   Never Rarely Neutral Often Always

8. shy
   Never Rarely Neutral Often Always

9. conscientious
   Never Rarely Neutral Often Always

10. athletic
    Never Rarely Neutral Often Always

11. affectionate
    Never Rarely Neutral Often Always

12. theatrical
    Never Rarely Neutral Often Always

13. assertive
    Never Rarely Neutral Often Always

21. reliable
    Never Rarely Neutral Often Always

22. analytical
    Never Rarely Neutral Often Always

23. sympathetic
    Never Rarely Neutral Often Always

24. jealous
    Never Rarely Neutral Often Always

25. leadership ability
    Never Rarely Neutral Often Always

26. sensitive to other's needs
    Never Rarely Neutral Often Always

27. truthful
    Never Rarely Neutral Often Always

28. willing to take risks
    Never Rarely Neutral Often Always

29. understanding
    Never Rarely Neutral Often Always

30. secretive
    Never Rarely Neutral Often Always

31. makes decisions easily
    Never Rarely Neutral Often Always

32. compassionate
    Never Rarely Neutral Often Always

33. sincere
    Never Rarely Neutral Often Always

41. warm
    Never Rarely Neutral Often Always

42. solemn
    Never Rarely Neutral Often Always

43. willing to take a stand
    Never Rarely Neutral Often Always

44. tender
    Never Rarely Neutral Often Always

45. friendly
    Never Rarely Neutral Often Always

46. aggressive
    Never Rarely Neutral Often Always

47. gullible
    Never Rarely Neutral Often Always

48. inefficient
    Never Rarely Neutral Often Always

49. acts as a leader
    Never Rarely Neutral Often Always

50. childlike
    Never Rarely Neutral Often Always

51. adaptable
    Never Rarely Neutral Often Always

52. individualistic
    Never Rarely Neutral Often Always

53. does not use harsh language
   Never Rarely Neutral Often Always

Appendix 1: Questionnaire from the Bem Sex Role Inventory
Works Cited

15 Dec. 2014.


Azevedo, Fernando José Fraga De. _Literatura Infantil E Leitores: Da Teoria às Práticas._ Braga: Universidade Do Minho, Instituto De Estudos Da Criança, 2006. Print


Connell, Raewyn. Gender and Power: Society, the Person, and Sexual Politics.


"Definition of Terms: Sex, Gender, Gender Identity, Sexual Orientation."


“Gender Differences in Goal Fulfillment and Education Choices” Stockholm: Skolverket. 2006.


Thomas, Calvin “Straight with a Twist: Queer Theory and the Subject of Heterosexuality” *Straight with a Twist: Queer Theory and the Subject of*


Children's Literature


RESUMEN EN CASTELLANO

El objetivo de esta investigación no es otro que demostrar el valor inconmensurable que posee la literatura infantil si es bien usada como agente para llegar a la infancia y prevenir los estereotipos de género en los niños (varones). Pero antes de adentrarme de lleno en la temática de la misma, me gustaría llevar a cabo una reflexión sobre el mundo doctoral y sus vicisitudes, detalle fundamental para entender la manera en la cual se ha elaborado este trabajo de investigación.

Una tesis es un documento complejo y extenso llevado a cabo durante multitud de horas de investigación y dedicación sobre un tema en concreto. Solía pensar que para ser, por ejemplo, un experto en literatura infantil inglesa todo lo que se necesitaba dominar era el campo de la literatura infantil inglesa. Sin embargo, he de reconocer que ser un “experto” en algo es realmente mucho más complicado que lo que había considerado como tal en un principio. Mi investigación doctoral me ha ayudado a ser consciente de lo que ser un doctor en determinada materia debería implicar. Gracias a este trabajo de investigación, he llegado a la conclusión de que obtener una licenciatura universitaria, un máster, o un doctorado no debería medirse únicamente en base al dominio de unos temas concretos sin alcanzar mayor conocimiento en otros campos. Un doctor que no puede mantener una discusión sobre economía, una abogada que no tiene conocimiento alguno de política, un docente que no entiende sobre temas de género...; ninguno de estos perfiles tienen sentido alguno ya en un mundo globalizado como el actual. Estar en posesión de unos estudios superiores debería implicar haber obtenido una amplia cultura general además de un conocimiento específico sobre una determinada área. Alcanzar un
doctorado debería capacitarte para defender tu punto de vista frente a otras personas en cualquier debate que surja sin importar la temática; al igual que tener una licenciatura debería prepararte para el mundo exterior en cuanto a relaciones sociales, innovación, y perspectivas emprendedoras, aunque raro es el caso que esto así ocurre.

Por lo tanto, en un intento de ser coherente con las ideas aquí expuestas he intentado que mi tesis estuviese integrada por disciplinas de diferente índole —entre las cuales nos encontraremos la antropología, la historia, la neurociencia, la psicología, o los estudios de género— para llegar al núcleo principal escogido como temática central de la misma.

Otra premisa que siempre consideré como fundamental en la realización de mi tesis doctoral era su practicidad. Siempre he deseado que mi trabajo llegase a ser útil tanto para mis colegas en su práctica educativa diaria, como para cualquier usuario de literatura infantil en algún momento de su vida. De igual manera ansío que todo este trabajo sirva como set de arranque para que muchos otros investigadores e investigadoras en literatura infantil se interesen también por el campo de los estereotipos de género, y más concretamente en lo que afecta a la representación de la figura del niño (varón⁴⁰) en el mismo.

Desde el comienzo de mi investigación, no he dejado de ser consciente de la cantidad de materias a las cuales debería tener acceso para obtener una visión global de la figura del niño, tanto en cuanto a su presencia como a su ausencia en el campo de la literatura infantil. A pesar del hecho de que algunos lectores/as o miembros del

⁴⁰ En este resumen en castellano he tenido que hacer esta distinción para no confundirnos con la palabra niño como conjunto de niños y niñas. Ya que la tesis está escrita en lengua inglesa, la distinción no es necesaria por la existencia de términos diferentes: boy, girl, children.
tribunal puedan llegar a tener en consideración algunos capítulos de esta tesis doctoral como no esenciales, o incluso alejados de la temática principal, he de puntualizar que la manera en la cual alcanzamos ciertas conclusiones no ha de ser menos importante que las propias conclusiones en sí. De hecho, el estar acostumbrados a trabajar con ideas evidentes y fácilmente identificables, nos lleva a hacer uso de ellas como si fuesen verdaderos axiomas. Por contra, no solemos tener la capacidad de proporcionar a nuestra audiencia una justificación clara de cómo hemos llegado a obtener determinados resultados, lo cual me parece un paso indispensable.

Por todo esto, he tratado de hacer lo posible para proporcionar a través de este estudio una gran variedad de ejemplos y razones que, aún en el caso de que no lleguen a convencer de todo al lector, sí serán los encargados de agitar sus creencias previas respecto a la figura del niño y su representación en la literatura infantil.

La investigación llevada a cabo para la resolución del primer capítulo de esta tesis me ha ayudado a adquirir el conocimiento necesario sobre feminismo y masculinismo para abordar la figura del niño en la literatura infantil en los capítulos posteriores. No siendo una experta en género, siempre he sido consciente de mi necesidad por aprender más sobre esta temática de manera urgente (tan poco trabajada, por otra parte, en la escuela universitaria del profesorado de primaria). Este primer capítulo se basa pues, en una introducción hacia el mundo del género y su relación con las masculinidades presentada como un saber esencial en el camino a la creación de un universo libre de estereotipos de género en la literatura infantil que lee nuestra infancia, ya que la teoría del género puede ser calificada como un
universo absolutamente desconocido para la mayoría de la gente. La oportunidad que he tenido al realizar esta investigación me ha llevado a hacerme consciente de mi absoluta ignorancia respecto al género por una parte, y a la gran cantidad de ideas preconcebidas y erróneas que había interiorizado durante mi vida hasta ese momento. En consecuencia, el principal objetivo de este capítulo consiste en ayudar a los lectores a ver a través de la venda que esta sociedad patriarcal de la cual formamos parte ha puesto sobre nuestros ojos, buscando la provocación de un sentimiento de incomodidad en el lector en cuanto a sus firmes convicciones sobre el mundo del género.

Esta tarea se llevará a cabo analizando el género desde sus tres aspectos más importantes, que son los siguientes: identidad, expresión y sexualidad. Estas tres aristas serán definidas y ejemplificadas una y otra vez, con el objetivo de proporcionar pruebas verosímiles a los lectores de los las diversas afirmaciones aquí expuestas. Las diferentes etiquetas en cuanto al género a las cuales se hará alusión se muestran como claramente clasificatorias respecto a los juguetes con los que nuestros peques se divierten, el tipo de ropa y colores que visten, e incluso las profesiones que escogen como sus futuras modelos de vida.

El masculinismo se presenta por un lado acompañando al feminismo en su camino hacia la igualdad, pero también como un detractor de este mismo movimiento que para alguna gente parece estar desmasculinizando a los hombres. Varios académicos provenientes de diferentes campos —psicología, literatura, antropología, educación— nos proporcionarán su conocimiento y experiencia en estudios sobre la masculinidad, para dejarnos claro que los niños y los hombres
también han de formar parte de los estudios de género. Este capítulo subrayará los
diferentes avances en cuanto al mundo del género que han tenido lugar últimamente,
para avanzar hacia una sociedad más libre y tolerante, lo cual no descarta por otra
parte que haya todavía mucho camino que recorrer en este campo.

A continuación, nos centramos en la temática del niño y la crisis que
envuelve a su figura. En el capítulo dos la ciencia hace aparición para darnos las
clavas sobre las diferencias entre los géneros, con la intención de entender el origen
de esta crisis. Se hace mención a dos hilos de opinión claramente diferenciados:
aquéllos que consideran que la biología es ciertamente la razón principal para
pertenecer a uno u otro género, y aquéllos que destacan que el único causante de
dicha diferencia entre niños y niñas no es otro que el entorno que nos rodea, es decir,
el factor socialización. Entre estos dos extremos aparece una verdad lógica a través
de la neurociencia y que conecta de alguna forma, ambas partes. Este campo
científico de la neurociencia, que se dedica a estudiar cómo funcionan las neuronas
en nuestro cerebro a través de las conexiones que llevan a cabo, nos invita a ver que
las cosas no son ni tan simples, ni tan blancas o negras cuando del cerebro se trata.
Este órgano, compuesto por millones de neuronas, nos hace ser lo que somos a través
de miles de interconexiones. Sin embargo, estas interconexiones eligen una u otra
dirección dependiendo del entorno que nos rodea, y como consecuencia, podemos
asegurar que nuestro hábitat tiene mucho que decir en cuanto a la manera en que
nuestras neuronas conectan, provocando así una u otra conducta.

El capítulo tres nos introduce en el mundo de la literatura infantil para ver
cómo aparece representada la figura del niño a través de los ojos de la misma. El
conocido como “Currículo oculto” tiene mucho que decir en todo esto, ya que la manera en la cual el profesorado transmite determinadas ideas en cuanto al género en sus clases —en su mayoría a través de formatos afectados por el género en sí, como son los libros de texto o la literatura infantil estereotipada— supone una gran influencia para los niños a la hora de elegir una u otra obra, si es que llegan en algún momento a considerar que la lectura también debe formar parte de su mundo. Una vez más, las opiniones son divergentes; por un lado los que apoyan a la literatura infantil tradicional, y por otro los que defienden la literatura infantil no estereotipada en cuanto al género.

Una vez adquiridos los conocimientos necesarios sobre la relación entre los niños y la literatura infantil, consideré como fundamental profundizar en el mundo de los libros dirigidos hacia la infancia, y los álbumes ilustrados eran sin duda la mejor opción para ello. Por lo tanto, el capítulo 4 se centra en los álbumes ilustrados y toda la teoría respecto a ellos que tan a menudo pasa desapercibida para nosotros educadores debido a la falta de formación en este campo. Igualmente se tratará, partiendo de los álbumes ilustrados, la gran influencia que la relación palabra-imagen tiene sobre la infancia. Aprenderemos sobre la importancia de no perderse ni un mínimo detalle de un álbum ilustrado, y cómo los pequeños y pequeñas son capaces de percibirlos de manera natural a través de la lectura y relectura del libro sin estar en posesión del conocimiento sobre deconstrucción de textos con el que contamos las personas adultas.

Para concluir, el último capítulo se centrará en la creación y maquetación de un álbum ilustrado. Todo el conocimiento adquirido en los cuatro capítulos
anteriores se pondrá en práctica en este capítulo con la producción y posterior publicación del libro *Martin Is the Best*. Algunas de las ilustraciones presentes en el libro también aparecerán en este capítulo; sin embargo, he decidido no incluir todas ellas para preservar “el efecto sorpresa” en el tribunal a la hora de entregarles una copia del propio álbum ilustrado.

El plan original de esta tesis incluía un sexto capítulo en el cual *Martin Is the Best* iba a ser estudiado y analizado en diferentes escuelas de primaria. Pero una vez inmersa en el proceso de la tesis llegué a la conclusión de que este estudio podría llegar a convertirse en otra tesis dentro de esta, por lo cual tomé la decisión de postergar este otro análisis para un futuro próximo. En esta nueva investigación me centraré en analizar las diferentes respuestas de las niñas y los niños hacia el libro creado durante el proceso de esta tesis, y cómo el uso de la literatura infantil que no presenta ninguna otra masculinidad que la hegemónica puede afectar a la infancia a la hora de entender el verdadero significado de ser un niño o un hombre.

El poder que atesora el profesorado no debería ser ignorado, ya que éste puede ser bien o mal empleado indistintamente, dependiendo sobre todo de la formación de los educadores y su implicación vocacional personal en la misión educativa. Dentro de esta esfera educacional la literatura infantil y juvenil surge como una herramienta maravillosa, pero que mal usada por parte de padres, madres y docentes puede llegar a tener consecuencias devastadoras. Por lo tanto, es de extrema importancia que tomemos conciencia de nuestras acciones como educadores sobre la manera en la cual gestionamos y transmitemos el significado del género y más concretamente las masculinidades a través de este tipo de literatura.
Estos últimos cuatro años han supuesto un gran cambio en cuanto a mi entendimiento respecto a la educación, la crianza y el género. Nunca habría pensado que el camino hacia la consecución de una tesis doctoral podría implicar tal cambio a nivel personal, pero no podría sentirme más orgullosa y satisfecha acerca de lo que esta investigación me ha proporcionado. Esta situación puede estar relacionada con el hecho de haber interiorizado los aprendizajes de mi investigación en mi persona, aplicándolos en mi vida actual como maestra, como madre y como recién estrenada emprendedora. Desde el momento en el cual comencé esta investigación estaba convencida de que quería involucrarme de manera activa en los principios de la misma, ya que sentía que había mucho por hacer para mejorar los aspectos aquí concretados.

Es tremendamente difícil escribir una conclusión sobre una materia sobre la cual piensas que queda mucho por hacer. En consecuencia, la conclusión principal que debo compartir es que esta investigación supone un verdadero punto de partida hacia un objetivo mucho más grande y duradero. De hecho, he de decir que esta tesis doctoral es ya la responsable de un proyecto educativo, orientado a abordar los estereotipos de género desde un punto de vista actual, diferente y fresco en el cual los niños y los hombres deben de estar igualmente incluidos.

Todas esas horas dedicadas a la lectura, la reflexión, el debate y la posterior transmisión de los conocimientos adquiridos me han servido para reconciliarme con el verdadero significado del género, y la manera en que puede afectar a la práctica educativa diaria como maestra, y mi vida como madre. Esta investigación también
me ha enseñado la escasa frecuencia en la cual se le ofrecen a los niños nuevos modelos de masculinidad, fuera de la tradicional masculinidad hegemónica, la cual además presenta muchos factores negativos como el sentido de superioridad respecto a lo femenino, la necesidad de ser los mejores en todo, la obligación de tener que ser líderes continuamente, y la falta de emociones entre muchos otros rasgos.

Siempre he tenido muy claro que quería disfrutar no solo del final de mi investigación sino del camino que me ha llevado hacia dicha meta. Esta ruta me ha llevado a recorrer universidades en tres países diferentes, en las cuales he compartido mi trabajo respecto al género, la educación y la literatura infantil. He sido invitada a escribir en plataformas reconocidas en el mundo de la educación como Tiching 41, para la cual he escrito un artículo sobre el sexismo inconsciente existente en nuestras aulas (“¿Somos Sexistas?” 42), y también una serie de artículos sobre creatividad en la educación (“Creatividad en el Aula” 43) donde expongo la manera en la cual los estereotipos de género son grandes bloqueadores de esa creatividad. El blog sobre liderazgo llamado Actitud Manager publicó el marzo pasado un artículo en el cual debatí sobre liderazgo femenino, haciendo uso de gran parte de los conocimientos adquiridos en el primer capítulo de esta investigación.

Sin embargo, sintiendo que el final de esta tesis se acercaba, sentía necesidad de centrarme en la creación de un proyecto duradero a través del cual poder compartir con la comunidad todos los conocimientos que esta investigación me había proporcionado, además de posibles iniciativas para superar las situaciones aquí

41 www.tiching.com
42 “¿Somos Sexistas en nuestra Aula de Manera Inconsciente?” http://blog.tiching.com/somos-sexistas-en-nuestra-aula-de-maneira-inconsciente/
43 “Creatividad en el Aula (I)”: http://blog.tiching.com/creatividad-en-el-aula-parte-i/
expuestas. Para ello comencé a asistir a diferentes foros de emprendimiento, y eventos de networking, en los cuales aprender como desarrollar una marca y al llegarla al público. Llegué incluso a formarme en oratoria para así poder mejorar mis habilidades expresivas y conseguir de esta manera que mi mensaje llegase a más gente. En febrero del 2015 participe en un concurso de oratoria por primera vez, donde competir contra abogados y sus elocuentes estrategias de debate fue todo un reto. El discurso que llevé a cabo trató sobre “Por qué el feminismo también es cosa de hombres”44, el cual me otorgó el primer puesto en esta competición que tuvo lugar en la Universidad de Santiago de Compostela. Nunca habría hablado sobre esta temática de no haber sido gracias a esta tesis doctoral.

Esto son parte de los detalles que en marzo del 2015 me llevaron a iniciar mi proyecto Realkiddys45, proyecto educativo que nace de esta misma investigación y en el cual me dedico a abrir debate en cuanto al género, la maternidad, la paternidad, la educación, y el género en la literatura infantil. Este proyecto quiere llegar al público a través de un tono fresco y ligero, para así provocar en ellos un sentimiento de incomodidad y confusión a corto plazo, y un posible activismo a largo plazo. Desde mi experiencia personal como maestra y como madre, puedo asegurar que hay multitud de cosas que estamos haciendo mal respecto al mundo del género, aunque en la mayor parte de las ocasiones esto sea una cuestión de pura ignorancia y escasa o nula formación.

Es considerablemente complicado alcanzar ciertas esferas cuando no tienes suficientes pruebas, documentación o datos objetivos. Sin embargo, estos últimos

44 “Porque el feminismo también es cosa de hombres”: https://youtu.be/FCwXOUFAgT8
45 Realkiddys: www.realkiddys.com
cuatro años me han proporcionado gran parte de la información que necesitaba para dirigirme al mundo, y compartir así no solo lo que estamos haciendo mal, pero también qué podemos hacer para mejorar.

El evento más importante y reconocido relacionado con esta investigación en el que he tomado parte ha sido una charla TEDTalk46. El congreso TEDxGalicia tuvo lugar el 19 de septiembre del 2015, y en él tuve la oportunidad de presentar mi proyecto educativo Realkiddys. El video de la presentación puede visionarse en la plataforma de Youtube: Tedxtalks.47

Todos los artículos, conferencias y productos generados a partir de esta tesis doctoral me llevaron a la conclusión de que todavía queda un gran camino para que los niños se sientan libres en cuanto a sus preferencias y decisiones, sin estar limitados por una única masculinidad demandada como la correcta por la sociedad. La literatura infantil es una de las herramientas más preciadas para educar a la infancia y los adultos sobre la aceptación del ilimitado de posibilidades que existe en cuanto a ser un niño, y la riqueza que tener una personalidad única sin importar el sexo o el género puede proporcionarnos.

Esperemos que con una buena aceptación y un uso frecuente de libros como Martin Is the Best la sociedad sea capaz de entender que las etiquetas no favorecen a nadie, y que los niños deben ser libres para ser ellos mismos, y así vivir ante todo como seres humanos felices.

46 Tedxtalks are local events on which to share ideas that affect specific communities. In Galicia (Spain) these conferences have been held since 2010, being TedxGalicia 2015 the one I took part in.
47 Link of TedxGalicia talk: https://youtu.be/DEEvonZQEW4