The representation of masculinity and femininity in children's books: A

deconstruction of gender in contemporary best-selling children's literature.

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ABSTRACT

Previous research regarding gender inequality in children's literature has focused predominantly on content analysis and paid little attention to the embedded ideological constructs within discourse. The key study by Weitzman et al (1972) discovered that females were displayed as passive, supplementary to men and underrepresented. Therefore, the current research aimed to investigate gender role discourse within best-selling contemporary literature in order to extend the findings in the research area.

Potter and Wetherell's discourse analysis (1987) was used to identify subject positions, ideological dilemmas and interpretive repertoires. The research had a feminist poststructuralist perspective which assisted the identification of power structures within 21st century books.

The findings displayed that females were no longer passive as they had equally present roles within the narrative however, female opportunities were limited to domesticity in comparison to males who had endless freedom. Concluding remarks propose that gender inequality is still pressing issue within children's literature.

Introduction: Background Literature

Previous literature on children's fiction has focused predominantly upon quantitative analysis investigating the underrepresentation of women, gender stereotyped roles (Weitzman et al, 1972; Hamilton et al, 2006; MaCabe et al, 2011) and historical representations of gender inequality (Clark et al, 2003). Previous research has indicated that women are underrepresented which suggests that they occupy a lesser role than men or boys within society (McCabe *et al*, 2011). Furthermore, the majority of research has focused on illustrated picture books. The current research adopts an entirely new approach as it uses discourse analysis to investigate the construction of gender. Moreover, it investigates books for children aged five to eight which is a under researched area. Therefore, the current research aims to contribute a development in the findings regarding the representations of masculinity and femininity in children's fiction.

Within society, there are a different set of normative rules for each gender defining specific ways to behave (Taylor, 2003). These rules are maintained until they become 'social norms' that persist within culture. Ultimately, they become gender stereotypes, which are a perceived idea about how a certain gender should behave (Aina and Cameron 2001). The representations within children's literature contain sexist ideologies yet, they have become so widely accepted that they are invisible ideologies that are 'commonplace' and natural ways of being (Jackson and Gee, 2006). Gender inequality and sexism is a prominent political issue that persists in mainstream culture. It is an issue that must be scrutinised as it is embedded within the discourses in society such as children's literature (Steyer, 2014: McCabe *et al* 2011).

Hilary Clinton, the US sectary of state proposes that gender inequality is the greatest unfinished business of the 21st century (Clinton, 2015). Gender inequality and sexism in society has maintained the oppression of women due to embedded constructs that support the dominance of masculinity (Brant 2011). Gender biased and sexist ideologies not only legitimise but also increase gender inequality and actively enhance the severity of the gender hierarchy, which subsequently reinforces patriarchal dominance (Brandt, 2011; Brant and Henry, 2012).

Patriarchy is an ideological construct that has been historically entrenched within society; it encompasses the domination of females, which provides men with an advantage over women (Crossley, 2005). Furthermore, hegemonic masculinity, which is underpinned by patriarchy, presents men as the holders of power and strength in opposition to women who are represented as the weak and powerless (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2006). Hegemonic masculinity defines the relationship of men towards women as oppressive, belittling and derogatory (Donaldson, 1993). The hegemonic norm appears to be a defining subject position taken up by men strategically to benefit themselves over women, such as the positioning of male characters within literature in order to establish a power structure that males dominate (Wetherell and Edley, 1999).

The investigation of children's literature is vital as it is a valuable asset to teaching which substantially influences children's education of gender roles and society (Trepanier-Street and Romatowski, 1999). It is apparent that children have not been receiving an accurate picture of society within the books (Louie, 2001). By the age of

four children begin to understand that gender is a basic component of the self; by then they have already had a substantial amount of interaction with books, which may have contained influential gender specific roles that lead to the development of dominant belief systems (Taylor, 2003).

Bem (1983) developed Gender Schema Theory, which indicates that children learn to be male or female by learning specific attributes associated with their gender and classifying themselves within the constraints of the gender assigned to their sex. Likewise, children have gender schemas from four or five years which enables them to display gender-specific behavioural traits, prefer engagement with same-sex peers and participate in activities defined by culture as specifically masculine or feminine. Additionally, social systems partake in the development of schemas as it is unlikely that the world would notice how strong a little girl is becoming or how nurturing a little boy is behaving (Bem, 1983). The classification of masculinity and femininity into specific gender roles influences children's role development, self-image and belief system (Hamilton *et al,* 2006). Therefore, children at the ages of five to eight develop a rigid concept of gender roles (Bem, 1983) and 'police them' (Lehr, 2001).

The second wave of feminism in the 1960's brought about the exploration of gender inequality. The increase of feminist advocates striving for equality lead to the investigation of how gender inequity was maintained within social practices such as children's literature (McCabe et al, 2011). Following this, Weitzman et al.'s (1972) ground-breaking study of children's literature discovered that women were greatly underrepresented in titles, central roles and illustrations of award winning books. Furthermore, when women were represented they were characterised in ways that reinforced traditional sex role stereotypes: girls were usually depicted passive and submissive in comparison to boys who were displayed as active and adventurous. Likewise, boys appeared to lead and rescue while girls followed and served others, men engaged in a wide range of occupations whilst women were depicted as wives and mothers (Weitzman et al 1972). Robust gender differences were found within character role and occupation, these findings have been consistently supported by further research (Jackson and Gee, 2006: DeWitt et al 2013).

 The prevalent gender bias was later reinforced by research displaying that males were present in one hundred percent of books and females were only present in seventy-five –percent. Likewise, one third of books published in a year included a male in the title whereas females were entirely absent (McCabe et al, 2011). Regardless of the book, series males were present more than females whether be it as an animal, central character or in the title (McCabe et al, 2011). Unequal representations within children's literature are likely to be a mere echo of an unequal society as a whole; women are still underrepresented in all higher paid careers (The Guardian, 2014).

Despite the storybooks taking place in 'chocolate factories or academies of wizardry, literary adventures educate children about what is expected in valued in the real world' (Diekman and Murnen, 2004:373). As books are often the primary presentation of societal values to children (Gooden and Gooden, 2001) they assist their creation of schemas and their constructions of reality (Burr, 2003), many of which they cannot actively experience for themselves. Language of all children's books, good, bad or indifferent has the potential to impact their schemas (Gooden

and Gooden, 2001). Lehr (2001) established that children's books are highly influential yet, are often not ideologically neutral. The implications of gender-biased discourse is profound as children are less able to distinguish between fact and fiction consequently, are unlikely to question representations provided to them (Diekman and Murnen, 2004).

Research also discovered that children were less open to feminist literature that offered alternative endings to traditional children's books. Davies (2003) discovered that children struggled to accept the diverse readings of characters who displayed behaviours outside gender 'norms'. 'The Paper Bag Princess' by Robert Munsch presented an empowerment of women by displaying a female protagonist, that did not 'just marry the prince' instead chose to live her life unconventionally and free of romantic relations. Davies (2003:71) predicted that the children would enjoy a diverse ending however, learnt that most four and five year olds were 'puzzled and wanted a different 'proper' ending'. Consequently, this indicated that by four years children are already conditioned to the concept of male-female relationships in which the male has the dominant role (Jackson and Gee, 2006). It was also apparent that many stories are still presenting the 'mundane gendered world of women in kitchen's but also the fantasy world in which women escape kitchen's and are beautiful and loved and of course the reward is their own kitchen' (Davies, 2001:49).

It appears that the confinement within gender roles developed from perception that sex and gender are the same concept. Nonetheless, gender is the socially constructed categorical difference between masculine and feminine behaviour whereas sex is defined as the biological difference between males and females (Holmes, 2007). As social norms for males and females are so intertwined and embedded within culture it becomes difficult to separate the two. This results in gender constraints (Lehr, 2001) which create the perception that females must behave feminine and males must behave masculine. Nevertheless, it is essential to recognise that gender is 'a social creation', 'a cultural representation' and become aware of how 'including that in children's literature is a key source in reproducing and legitimising gender systems and gender inequality' (McCabe et al, 2011:218).

Moreover, children who display behaviour outside gender constraints such as girls who enjoy playing action games with the boys or boys who enjoy the 'home corner' (Davies, 2003) are perceived as abnormal and encouraged to engage in typical gender specific behaviours (Bem, 1983). Rigid gender norms within society and literature can have detrimental impacts upon children (Hamilton et al 2006) especially those who do not conform to them. Therefore, an increased awareness of the implications of the rigidity is needed hence why, the current study allows for the deconstruction of detrimental ideologies, which restrict children's ability to express themselves freely.

Additionally, non-sexist literature provides potentially positive impacts on children as stories read to them presenting women in non-traditional roles allows them to accept women in non-typical roles unlike their counterparts who have been limited to books with dominant male characters (Steyer, 2014). Conversely, opposing views suggest that stereotypes have a positive influence on children during the gender acquisition phase as stereotypes provide a framework in which a child can aspire to achieve. Subsequently, children with more gender typicality have a higher self-esteem (Yunger et al, 2004).

Hence, gender norms do not directly have detrimental impacts on children however, the rigidity of them may restrict a child's ability to reach their full potential, meaning a reconsideration of what social norms present would be beneficial. Providing stereotypes that are without constraints in literature would provide children with options to choose who they wish to be on a wider spectrum of gender, rather than strictly feminine or masculine.

Children's literature is fundamental to their learning yet, it provides prominent depictions of inequality, which depicts women as worthless, and that it is essentially a man's world (Gooden and Gooden, 2001). In consequence, this results in the perception that females are inferior and incompetent (Diekman and Murnen, 2004). Walkadine (1981) discovered that unequal and negative portrayals of women encourage boys to develop sexist attitudes from a young age. As literature is vital to child development, it is important to uncover and raise awareness of sexist discourse and identify if such inequality still occurs. Alongside books, evidence of other depictions of inequality are prominent within media, children's educational software and video games, it is clear that despite a demand for egalitarianism, inequality still exists throughout society (Steyer, 2014).

As gender inequality is still dominant political issue (Clinton, 2015) it presents a plausible explanation for the underrepresentation of women in children's literature. Therefore, the overall objective of this research is to enhance the understanding of the way masculinity and femininity is constructed within contemporary children's storybooks. Additionally, the research aims to use a discourse analysis approach, which has not been used before in order to contribute new findings to the research area. Specifically, the study aims to answer the following research questions using discourse analysis with a feminist poststructuralism approach:

1. How are female roles presented in comparison to males?
2. Are power structures developed in a way, which allows masculinity to be presented as the social norm?
3. Has 21st century awareness of gender inequality meant that changes have occurred and decreased traditional representations of gender in children's literature?

The research aims to raise awareness of unconscious messages presented to children, if children develop whilst learning to embrace gender equity rather than reject it, the desire to change will become widespread across society.

Method

Design

This research used a qualitative approach which meant an in-depth exploration of discourse within children's storybooks was able to take place. Qualitative research is open-ended, inductive and concerned with the generation of theory and exploration of meaning (Willig, 2013). Potter and Wetherell's (1987) discourse analysis (DA) approach was used with a feminist poststructuralist perspective (Lazar, 2006).

Discourse Analysis

DA is the study of language, text and visual image to explore underlying meaning and power structures (Wetherell et al, 2001). Discourse is indisputably embedded within cultural phenomena and social values (Fairclough, 2001). Previous research on children's literature has focused on quantitative analysis such as disparity of character representations and historical change whereas the current research is discursively analytic and explores the construction of meaning through discourse in order to identify representations of gender inequality.

The relationship between discourse, knowledge and power indicates that representations and meanings producing a particular object or situation consequently, create knowledge of the world (Foucault, 2001). Hence, unequal social norms that are recreated without awareness will continue to maintain inequality. Dominant social groups provide prominent representations which are interpreted as the norm; prolonged gender-bias discourse which is persistently recreated within aspects of culture continues to benefit a patriarchal society. The current analysis will address if the construction of sex roles assists the maintenance of patriarchal dominance.

This research has a feminist perspective based upon feminist poststructuralism, which identifies how power is organised, enacted and conflicting in society whilst being embedded in forms of discourse (Lazar, 2006). Poststructuralism proclaims that knowledge is constituted through language, which is socially constructed thus, gender can be seen as a political and social construct (Blaise, 2005:15).

Furthermore, discursive psychology indicates that gender is 'accomplished by social interaction' and is fluid and flexible rather than a fixed entity (Edley, 2001:192). Social constructionism proposes that meaning is mediated through daily interaction and constantly changing (Burr, 2003). Consequently, language was chosen as the focus of analysis in order to locate dominant ideology and cultural hegemony. The study of discourse meant that dominant ideologies that create gender representations were deconstructed.

Positonality

The epistemological position of the researcher was social constructionist, influenced by the work of Foucault (2001) and Burr (2003). The researcher was interested in the way social norms, particularly gender norms are created, defined and maintained by society. The researcher also has a feminist perspective influenced by the work of Davies (2003) and strongly supports the notion of equal opportunities for women.

Materials

The corpus for the study was the top ten best-selling children's books from 'Waterstones' which provides a wide range of books and trades from around three hundred stores within the UK and Europe. The children's books were purchased (8th of January 2015) with an age range of 5-8 years as these children hold the most prominent ideas of gender roles (Bem, 1983). The price range was 'under £5' as it was the most affordable price which meant the books are more accessible. A detailed book list can be found in appendix 1.

Procedure

Following ethical approval (BPS, 2009), discourse from the first four chapters of each book was analysed which meant character formulation and storyline was adequately established. The stories were analysed using the three analytical concepts of Pottering and Wetherell's (1987) DA.

The first concept was the subject positions (SP) which identified how interactions between characters were developed in order to adopt either a dominant or a submissive position. This model also encompassed the presentation of identities constructed by ideology rooted in social ideals for example, typical masculine and feminine roles (Edley, 2001). Finally, this tool was useful for comparing how characters were positioned alongside one another in order to uncover depictions of inequality.

The interpretive repertoires (IRS) was the second concept analysed, this construct addressed the logical ways of discussing objects and events that are based on pre-existing knowledge in society (Edley, 2001). Additionally, the IRS are themes across the data such metaphors or figures of speech that are reoccurring with the same basis of knowledge but are presented differently. The IRS were crucial as they assisted the identification of underlying meaning.

The final construct was the ideological dilemma (ID) developed by Billig (1988) which is characterised by inconsistency and contradiction relating to an indication of how people 'should' think and act. Likewise, they appeared as different ways of discussing topics that did not arise spontaneously or independently but existed together as opposing positions in an 'argumentative exchange' (Edley, 2001:204).

Analysis and Discussion

Subject Positions

The analysis revealed that subject positions (SP) functioned in a way which reinforced hegemonic masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2006), patriarchy (Crossley, 2005) and the gender hierarchy (Brant and Henry 2012). Across, the majority of the narratives males were indisputably in a leading position and if a female was cast in a leading role subtle depictions would occur in which the male exerted his dominance in order to disrespect or disempower the female, indicating the power still lies with the male character.

A representation of an SP, which reinforced hegemonic masculinity, occurred within Luna and the Loomband Fairy as Jack was disrespectful towards Sarah who told him he must start with a small project:

> 'Someone as important as *me* shouldn't have to be patient or start small. The girls heard him snap as he stomped past them'.

This quote displayed that his response was aggressive, domineering and consequently, created an empowered position for himself despite the female offering help. He disregarded Sarah's statement and appeared shocked that she assumed

he may need help or should be 'patient' as if it was an outrage; patience appeared to be a characteristic strictly associated with femininity.

Moreover, the male goblins were discriminatory towards the girls in Luna and the Loomband Fairy and Heidi and the Vet Fairy numerously as they referred to them as 'stupid', suggesting they were incompetent. This finding was present across most narratives and was a new discovery thus, extends previous research. These representations were emphasised as female characters were never depicted being derogatory towards males. Additionally, the derogatory depictions were subtlety presented and older powerful males, police or villagers often made the sexist remarks.

The second SP was the depiction of males in a position of superiority reinforcing hegemonic masculinity. This SP was present in Flat Stanley as the police humiliated Mrs Lambchop and treated her as an object of laughter when refusing to believe her son was down the pothole looking for her ring:

> 'Get the net, Harry'...'we have caught a cuckoo!'

The policemen described her as 'cuckoo' presuming she was crazy and used the event as an excuse to belittle her. Concluding the event Stanley was lifted from the hole with the ring and became a hero in contrast to Mrs Lambchop who was subject to harassment from the police. This finding expands on the previous notion of female underrepresentation in literature by using a textual discourse interaction to deem females as an inferior to males.

Furthermore, the denigration of women was displayed across all narratives primarily written by male authors. Remarkably, the findings also discovered that female authors included representations which oppressed women. These representations could be due to the notion that patriarchy is entrenched within society and has become normalised to the extent that it is difficult to acknowledge that process, which oppresses women is even occurring.

Subject positions, which reinforced patriarchy occurred within The Iron Man and Flat Stanley. Male characters within Flat Stanley were depicted in superior roles such as Mr Dart: an 'important man' whereas the foremost female character was positioned as a mother. The Iron man focused primarily on male characters, the lexicon 'he' was commonly used displaying an underrepresentation and passivity of women. The father was positioned as the domineering figure which presented a patriarchal ideology (Crossley, 2005) embedded within the story as the discourse indicated that he owned the property as it was the 'father's farm' regardless of his wife living there. Likewise, when Hogarth (his son) saw the Iron Man, discourse indicated he must get home and tell his father, which immediately depicted the father as a paramount figure and protector of the family.

The implications of these findings are profound as research indicates that if children consistently observe representations of females as mother figures and father's as providers it will influence their perception of what they believe is expected of them when they become adults (DeWitt et al, 2013). The findings within this subject positon continue extend the notion that males are superior figures who dominate careers and female roles are restricted and in some cases are still passive. This portrays masculinity as more valuable overall and commendable within the world of work. The findings also present disconcerting discoveries, which display that

embedded patriarchal constructs oppressing women are still present and many more adjustments are needed before a tangible depiction of equality can be observed within children's fiction.

Furthermore, a seemingly powerful subject position of a woman occurred within Frankie and the Rowdy Romans as Captain Lasher: the leader of the Roman's was depicted in battle with Frankie's team. Nevertheless, she was defeated when Frankie distracted her by throwing a wooden ball, which resulted in the horse and cart falling over:

'Without stopping to think, he grabbed it spun around and hurled it with a grunt'

This event displayed that she was conquered with diminutive exertion from the male furthermore, highlighted the issues women face in children's literature; if they are ambitious, they can aspire to be powerful but will still be defeat by men eventually. This finding poses an attempt at inequality, which is a discovery that differs from previous literature however, does not truly display any improvements in depicting females as powerful.

Additionally, discourse referring to Captain Lasher illustrates her as a 'tall women wearing tight-fitting leather' which she has been depicted in by a male author. Therefore, she is displayed as a powerful female yet, by wearing '*tight-fitting* leather' she has already been constructed as an object of the male gaze (Mulvey, 2009) as the description has sexual connotations. In consequence, her 'powerful positon' was superficial and a disempowerment, constructed for the male eye even within children's literature. Unflattering depictions of women occurred throughout the data set, Frankie and the Pirate Pillages (FPP) depicted a female stallholder who was labelled a 'con', and Mrs Pratchett the 'grumpy next door neighbour'.

These findings present a development from previous research as it identifies that the underrepresentation of women is no longer the pressing issue; however, the positioning of women still displays an overwhelming amount of inequality. Although an increased representation of women is a development, women are still dominated by patriarchal ideologies which presents them within domesticity which is still predominantly identified as 'women's work' (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2006). Furthermore, if they are displayed as powerful the depiction is superficial. Likewise, although women are rarely passive within the narratives, which is an entirely new finding, they are still following rules and regulations set by male authority figures.

Interpretive Repertoires

Within the data, there was a range of interpretive repertoires (IRS) which emphasised the differences between masculinity and femininity. The IRS functioned as themes; those discussed are the female display of emotion, females in domesticity and nurturing roles and mothers as primary caregivers.

Emotion is a domain within society, which appears to have robust gender differences as females report experiencing emotion more frequently and intensely than males (Fivush *et al,* 2000). This construct was recreated as an IR within the findings as depictions of emotion were a prominent feature of femininity. Females often displayed outbursts of emotion such as crying or exasperation in response to difficult or even trivial situations which were then interpreted as an overreaction. In comparison fear or sadness was never expressed in the form of tears by males

despite, many of the narratives displaying that the male character endured intense hardship. Instead, male characters were often depicted as 'struggling', feeling fearful, 'afraid or puzzled'.

Discourse within Luna and the Loomband fairy presented this IR:

> 'Even Oscar was struggling and one little girl was crying because she couldn't make her bands connect'.

Firstly, the quote '*Even Oscar*' indicated that it was outrageous for him to struggle which further implied there was no hope for the females. The girl was depicted as crying which represented her as distraught and displayed that Oscar was less emotional and more capable in the activity as he was merely 'struggling'. The finding was consistent with research indicating that women are generally perceived as more emotional than men and are believed to experience and express, admiration, embarrassment, fear, distress, happiness, guilt, sympathy, sadness and love more often than men who express anger and pride more often (Plant et al*,* 2000).

Furthermore, discourses within society that suggest that men must 'get over it' (Martin and Doka, 2000) whereas females can display emotion freely, these dominant representations were recreated within the data set. Research on picture books also found comparable constructions of femininity (Anderson and Hamilton, 2005) therefore, current research findings have expanded previous study as the findings indicate that the construction is consistent across textual books. Circulating discourses in society such as these that are recreated within children's literature create difficulties for both genders equally as male children will develop schemas which assign the expression of emotion strictly to femininity encouraging them to believe they are not 'a real boy' if they display emotion (Grant, 2004).

Women are also depicted within children's books as clumsy, silly, lacking intelligence and less competent in their ability to accomplish things in comparison to men who are achievement orientated (Ya-Lun Tsao, 2004). Findings from Flat Stanley support this research as Mrs Lambchop 'began to cry' when she dropped her ring which constructed femininity as clumsy and lacking self-regulation skills. The female character is unable to look for alternative solutions without an outburst of emotion, which suggests that females would be unable to deal with pressures that coincide with demanding careers.

Females constructed within the role of domesticity is the second IR, which highlighted the presentation of women as supplementary and subordinate to males. A predominant representation of this occurred within Frankie and the Pirate Pillagers:

> 'Frankie slid on his knees, thinking his mum would kill him when she saw the grass stains'.

This quote displayed that only his mother would be concerned with the dirt on his clothes and discipline him, with no reference to his father. This notion constructed femininity in a way which was primarily concerned with cleaning up after the family (Davies, 2003). Additionally, the female was cast as the 'capable mother' (Wharton, 2008:249) who essentially rectifies the mistakes or mess made by male characters such as Frankie. Mothers were displayed this way in every book whereas males

were entirely absent in the role of domestic chores which assisted the construction of males as a superior gender who must be cared for and served by females (Diekman and Murnen, 2005).

Moreover, females were presented with a concern for animals, individuals or the wider community, which involved committing selfless acts that did not result in the entitlement of being a 'hero' (Davies, 2003). Additionally, another new discovery displayed that young females were represented with a strong bond to another character such a friend, a mother, or an animal. Femininity appeared to be produced with an emphasis on intimate and strong female relationships. Previous research indicated that this construction occurs as these relationships enable 'working-class girls to cope with the exigencies of patriarchal power in the labour market and domestic sphere' (Kehily et al, 2010: 169). Furthermore, friendship and emotional expression was viewed as a key marker of femininity, which is consistent to research suggesting that friendships are an important support network in the 'face of sexism and domestic drudgery' (Kehily et al, 2010:169).

Furthermore, mothers were the primary caregiver whilst fathers were notable largely by their invisibility (Adams et al 2011), indicating that men have much less obligation to care for the children, a depiction that is inaccurate within society (Anderson and Hamilton, 2005). The Brave Kitten displayed a mother-daughter relationship with no mention of a father and The Forgotten Puppy displayed a separated family where the children spent the week with mum and weekend with dad; Helena's quote described her disappointment of her father's absence when she was choosing a puppy:

> 'She wished her dad was with them.'

The construction of the father figure across the books was a fun weekend companion who was absent during the majority of the narrative (DeWitt et al, 2013).

Conversely, the mother was positioned as the primary caregiver throughout who was involved in mundane weekly tasks; some mothers also had occupations, which displayed a more modern society. However, Helena's mum was teacher and the mother in The Brave Kitten worked from home, which presented the characters confined within the home and nurturing roles even within an occupation.

The mothers appeared to exist within the modern constructs of a 'supermum' who balances both home and work life singlehandedly (Jackson and Gee, 2006). These findings have added to previous research as mothers are still the primary caregiver committed to domesticity however, they now also balance careers alongside home life.

Ideological Dilemmas

The ideological dilemmas (IDS) within the data presented problematic contradictions such as surface depictions of equality, young girls who faced limitation within career choice, women who experienced a lack of freedom as mothers and the inability for males to express emotion as it was deemed humiliating to not be 'tough'.

The first dilemma was restriction around career choice and opportunities for females. This dilemma encompassed the notion of surface depictions of equality that were apparent as females engaged in typically masculine physical sports such as football(Schmalz and Kerstetter, 2006) (Frankies Magic Football), males took part in jewellery making (Luna and the Loom Band Fairy) and females embarked on

adventures with males (Beast Quest). However, it was apparent that the depictions of equality were merely paying lip-service to an aspiration of equality as the deconstruction of discourse displayed that females and males were still portrayed in traditional domestic roles. This representation was present in in Beast Quest 2 when Elena and Tom are on an adventure together and stop for a break:

> Elena: 'I'll go and see if there is any nuts or berries on these bushes'.

Previous research has indicated that mothers outside of the home were still represented as domestic (Jackson and Gee, 2006) whereas current findings extended this notion as young females were also dominating a domestic positon in unlikely circumstances.

Furthermore, the girls in Heidi and the Vet Fairy who aspired to be vets were still limited in the roles they undertook:

> 'The girls would be making cups of tea and coffee, serving sandwiches…and keeping the waiting room nice and tidy'.

The findings displayed that the discourse appeared to indicate equality as females were ambitious however, in reality they were depicted in roles concerned with providing for others therefore, were as confined within domesticity as mothers. Conversely, consistent to previous studies fathers and young males were not represented in domesticity at all (Jackson and Gee, 2006).

Additionally, the restriction often came from within the female characters as ambitious females discredited themselves such as Lucy in Brave Kitten:

> 'I haven't decided yet what I want to be – whether I should be a nurse or an actual vet…Being a vets harder'.

This narrative displayed a young female with an ambition to be a vet, nonetheless does not see herself capable. This dilemma presented the limited career choice for females, as the occupations they desired were still primarily caring jobs; no females aspired to be an adventurer or a footballer. It appeared that the concept of roles was gender specific and extremely diverse as males were in occupations (Crabb and Marciano, 2011) such as farmers, police, business owners or doctors and despite, women's aspirations they still appeared mainly in unpaid domestic work (DeWitt et al, 2013).

The third dilemma was the lack of freedom, which coincided with femininity; Mrs Lambchop in Flat Stanley outwardly expressed the discontent she felt confined within her domestic and nurturing responsibilities whilst her husband alternated between family and work life:

> ''You're at the office all day, having fun' she said. 'You don't realise what I go through with the boys. They're very difficult'…'Kids are like that' Mr Lambchop said. Phases. Be patient dear'.'

This discourse highlighted the incarceration Mrs Lambchop experienced coinciding with resentment towards her husband's escape from family life. The discourse emphasised the discredit given to mother's domestic work as importance is placed upon the male career which provides for the household. Additionally, her husband

responded insensitively and was unable to understand her struggle as he insisted that she was lacking patience, rather than issue coinciding with the difficulty of full time childcare. Furthermore, he did not suggest she found a hobby or employed a childminder instead; she must 'be patient' as if caring for the children is her primary and only purpose.

The final dilemma was the notion that it was unacceptable for males to display sensitive or caring behaviours. This dilemma emphasised how bravery, strength and toughness was a fundamental and respectable construct of masculinity (Jackson, and Gee, 2006; Grant, 2004). If males were depicted as sensitive or fearful they were challenged by others, a key depiction of this finding occurred in Frankie and the Pirate Pillagers:

> Frankie: '"Not scared are you?"…'Charlie blushed and all his freckles stood out, "Course not".'

This discourse presented a construction of masculinity, which indicates that it is humiliating for a male to display emotion. This resulted in the 'tough male' (Grant, 2004) construction which occurred as Charlie refused to display emotion or deviate from toughness in fear of being disrespected and appearing cowardly. Furthermore, it became apparent that an expression of emotion was to be avoided within the constructs of masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2006).

The current finding reinforced the tradition within society that males are unable to admit weakness or emotion (Martin and Doka, 2000) which is a finding that has not been discovered previously within children's literature. These findings presented troubling conclusions contrary to the claim that gender equality exists within society as it is apparent there are many sectors in which equality has not yet been achieved (Steyer, 2014).

Conclusion

To conclude, the present research study was conducted in order to provide up-to-date research findings on gender inequality within children's literature. Whereas previous research has focused upon children's picture books and quantitative analysis the current study focused upon textual analysis. In doing so, the current research has contributed new findings to this research area and provided an insight into wider gender issues within contemporary literature additional to the underrepresentation of women.

With the use of Potter and Wetherall's Discourse Analysis, an approach not previously used in this research area the analysis extended prior research. The research discovered that gender inequality has shifted from underrepresentation of women to their positioning, which is a more subtle depiction of inequality as they were rarely displayed passively but their positioning was still far from complementary.

All three of the research questions were answered to the satisfaction of the researcher and it was concluded that gender bias is still a prevalent and concerning issue. Furthermore, intriguing findings displayed that females are active but still primarily located within domesticity even outside of the home. Finally, male dominated power structures were prevalent within all stories even those with female authors.

The current research has increased the awareness of gender inequality that is still embedded within constructs of society such as children's literature. Although it has

been forty-five years since the initial study on children's books in 1972, it seems that little has changed in the best-selling literature of 2015. This presents a concerning conclusion and the need for further investigation to increase awareness and encourage social change and gender equality. Although the study focused on ten books they represented the best-selling books from a well-known retailer indicating that these are the representations many children are reading. Further research conducting a replication of this study on a larger scale would be able to investigate if the results are consistent or differ on a larger scale. Likewise, it would be interesting to investigate the attitudes of children surrounding gender roles and the influence of books from the children themselves.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity within research is fundamental as it assists the researcher in being aware of how the self-impacts the creation of knowledge, whilst self-monitoring the impact of biases, beliefs and personal experiences upon research (Berger, 2015). A reflexive position meant the researcher was aware of how personal experience of being a female, teaching assistant may have influenced the research.

An awareness of the influence of personal beliefs helped the researcher ensure that the beliefs did not dominate the analysis and stay impartial when investigating the data, but also be aware that personal views will inevitably impact upon the meaning and context of the experience under investigation (Berger, 2015). Potter and Wetherell's (1987) discourse analysis approach was at a first difficult to use with data written for children however, with determination and extensive research it became a possibility. The results found were both similar and different to what was expected, due to the previous research reviewed aspects of gender inequality were presumed however, contrary to assumptions, the gender inequality depicted was far greater than expected.

The current research idea was derived from personal practice within primary education with children aged 7-8, which involved the discussion of character roles within books. When asking a young boy about why the girl was not allowed to become a knight (until she dressed as male and aimed to fight) he responded with, 'because she's a girl, girls can't be knights' and when asked 'why?' he continued with 'girls just can't be knights'. This discussion prompted an interest surrounding gender roles and the way children accept them as the norm and abide by them. As reading is a fundamental part of children's school life and the researcher is an aspiring teacher this research area was chosen to investigate and resulted in remarkable findings.

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