



Female and Male Depictions in Picturebooks: Non-conventional Models for Boys and Girls

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State of the art

Children's literature (from picturebooks to novels) selects a different approach when portraying males and females.

Men and women are presented as two opposite poles that cannot meet or merge. (Gianini Belotti 1978; Biemmi 2007; Ulivieri 2014).

Women represent a minority and are seldom portrayed as main/active characters.

Female depictions are strongly stereotyped and related to an outdated ideal of beauty, maternity, and/or domesticity (Lopez 2018).

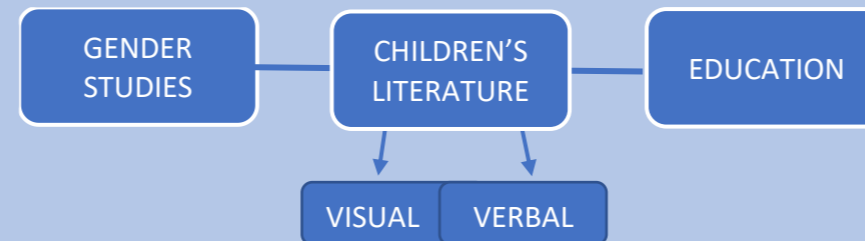
Men are extensively represented from a quantitative perspective, but their depiction is strongly linked to a stereotyped, toxic masculinity.

Aims

- To analyse non-traditional characters (male and female) and their construction from a gender-sensitive perspective;
- To find out new trends in contemporary children's literature regarding gender models;
- To discover which gender-related stereotypes persist in nonconventional texts and what can be done to deconstruct them through words and images.

Method

Research fields



Literary sample

- Picturebooks (p.b.) for 3-8 years-old children (Faeti 1972; Nodelman 1990)
- National/international p.b. published in Italy
- Contemporary works (last twenty years)
- P.b. redefining male and female identities

Tools

Semi-structured analysis of the characters based on a research form which investigates and relates:

General information
Textual elements
Visual elements



Preliminary results

- Many secondary characters are stereotyped, although presented in books with non-conventional protagonists;
- Femininity is more deconstructed than masculinity;
- New fatherhoods and motherhoods (?);
- Binarism.

Limits and future investigations

- Binary approach – Male vs. Female;
- Sectorial literature / limited sample;
- Gender-oriented publishers;
- Italian context.

Selected bibliography

BIEMMI I., *Educazione sessista. Stereotipi di genere nei libri delle elementari*, Rosenberg & Sellier, Torino 2012; GIANINI BELOTTI E. (a cura di), *Sessismo nei libri per bambini*, Edizioni Dalla Parte delle Bambine, Milano 1978; HUNT P., *An Introduction to Children's Literature*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2009; LOPEZ A. G. (a cura di) *Decostruire l'immaginario femminile*, ETS, Pisa 2017; FAETI A., *Guardare le figure*, Einaudi, Torino 1972; NIKOLAJEVA M., *The Rhetoric of Character in Children's Literature*, Scarecrow Press, Lanham 2002; NODELMAN P., *Words about Pictures: The Narrative Art of Children's Picture Books*, University of Georgia Press, Athens 1990; ULIVIERI S. (a cura di), *Corpi violati. Condizionamenti educativi e violenza di genere*, FrancoAngeli, Milano 2014.

