

## GENDER-FLUID CHARACTERS IN HANS WILHEM'S PICTURE BOOKS

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### Abstract

This essay looks into the picture books of Hans Wilhem's *Bunny Trouble* (1985) and *Bad, Bad Bunny Trouble* (1994), which depict the non-binary gender aspects of the main character, Bunny. The two picture books portray Bunny as a boy who possesses and demonstrates both masculine and feminine characteristics concurrently. This issue criticizes the rigid definition of traditional gender binary that had been inculcated and constructed in the society (Butler, 1990). By paying attention to the narrative and illustrative elements of the picture books, this essay sheds lights on how Bunny and other supporting characters fervently delineate that gender as fluid aspects rather than rigid characteristics that cannot be possessed and demonstrated by the main character and other characters as well.

**Keywords:** *gender aspects, gender-fluid character, picture books*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Gender has a term entails social norms, attitudes and activities that society consider as more appropriate for one sex over another. "Gender is a kind of enforced cultural performance, compelled by compulsory heterosexuality, and that, as such, it is performative." (Butler, 2008:20). It means that gender can be viewed from where one behaves and perform in the society as well as in culture. Generally, gender is most likely identified and attributed from the one's biological sex.

A gender stereotype is a grouping of people based on gender and the attributes they use. Thus, people know the men and women are alike. As Heilman (2012) points out, "Stereotypes

are generalization about groups that are applied to individual group members simply because they belong to that group, and gender stereotypes are generalizations about the attributes of men and women." Gini and Pozzoli's (2006, as cited in Macobby, 1998) argues, "Masculinity is mainly characterized by instrumental personality traits, such as independence, self-affirmation, risk-taking, social dominance, and aggressiveness. In contrast, femininity is mainly characterized in terms of expressive traits, such as warmth, sensitivity, and altruism." It means, that masculinity and femininity have differences by characterization where male are stronger than female.

The gender stereotype also covers masculinity and femininity in which males are stereotyped to be masculine and females are stereotyped to be femininity. Heilmen (2012) states that “Prescriptive gender stereotypes designate what women and men should be like”. Meanwhile, males and females are different by personality and role behaviors. Orlofsky and Stake’s (1981 as cited in Pleck, 1976) points out, “Masculinity and femininity have been seen as opposite ends of a single dimension of personality traits, interests and role behaviors which differentiate males and females.” It is what makes the society stereotype in assessing individuals who have attitudes or roles that are not in accordance with their biological sex.

Furthermore, masculinity and femininity are also depicted in picture books. Picture books are literary works whose stories are accompanied by illustrations to entertain typically young reader. According to Kennedy (2019) points out, “A picture book is a book, typically for children, in which the illustrations are as important as—or more important than—the words in telling the story.” For instance, children book reveals gender stereotype are *Bad*,

*Bad Bunny Trouble* by Hans Wilhelm (1994) and *Bunny Trouble* by Hans Wilhelm (1985). Gender stereotype its depiction of underrepresented extensive roles for male characters, the different occupations for female characters, and different characteristic between male and female.

This study analyzes the gender stereotype of two selected picture books in Hans Wilhelm which are *Bad, Bad Bunny Trouble* (1994) and *Bunny Trouble* (1985). The book about a bunny named Ralph who loved soccer more than anything else. The book also represents a male character who has the same characteristic as a female, and vice versa. The story exposes Ralph’s nature by playing soccer, making noise, and playing until his clothes get all dirty. On the other side, he was also crying when he was put into a cage by the farmer. However, it is possible if males and females have the same characters. In other case, Ralph as a male who was crying when he was put in a cage by the farmer and his sister comes to help him to open the cage. Furthermore, gender stereotype in this study is related to being masculinity and femininity wherein Ralph had a weakness if he was scared and his sister was dominant and

stronger when she was helping her brother. Their relationship was established in changing gender roles.

This study scrutinizes gender stereotype; masculinity and femininity in Hans Wilhelm's two selected picture book related to gender issues proposed by Butler (1999). Therefore, this article examines 1) How the gender stereotypes are portrayed in Hans Wilhelm's two selected picture books and, 2) How gender binary is no longer used as a determinant of one's gender. This article scrutinizes the gender stereotype exposed in the narrative and illustrative elements of the picture books. Moreover, it depicts that gender binary is no longer a determinant of gender.

## 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Hunt (2004) opines that Children's Literature is (among many other things) a body of texts (in the widest senses of that word), an academic discipline, an educational and social tool, an international business and a cultural phenomenon. Moreover, Children's Literature as an object for children to learn things that lead to discipline and learn cultures in their own country and abroad. Kuethe (1966) points out that Children's Literature suggests that

stories that employ animals as their protagonists have generally been considered more appropriate for boys than for girls. It means that Children's Literature is considered more appropriate for boys if they employ animals as their protagonists. Moreover, the animals are related to or identified as boys because they are strong have masculine attributes. Hunt (2004) argues that,

“The attitude a picture book implies about whether children should act like the animals they naturally are or the civilized social beings' adults want them to be is a key marker in identifying it either as a didactic book intended to teach children or as a pleasurable one intended to please them”.

Children's Literature has specific characteristics and purpose to serve. Interestingly, Lukens (2020) opines that “Picture book is the genre most clearly dependent upon illustration. Moreover, illustration has the characteristic of an art form, however, it should be regarded as art”. Consequently, picture book is one of the elements of Children's Literature that is related to illustrations to help children easily understand the contents of the book and make their imagination much more developed.

Picture book is arranged prominently in both narrative and

illustrative elements. Since, both of elements are very helpful for the readers to understand the story. There are some elements in the picture book. Character, plot, setting, and point of view are some major narrative elements. Character is the most significant in picture book. As Abrams (1999) points out, “Character is the name of literary genre, it is short, and usually witty, sketch in prose of a distinctive type of person”. It explains that the characters in a story are very important because the success of a story is based on the characters made in it. Plot is the scheme of the story. As Abrams (1999) points out, “Plot as dramatic or narrative work that is constituted by its events actions, as these are rendered and ordered toward achieving particular artistic and emotional effects”. It means, plot as narrative that is constituted by events actions and emotional effects of the story.

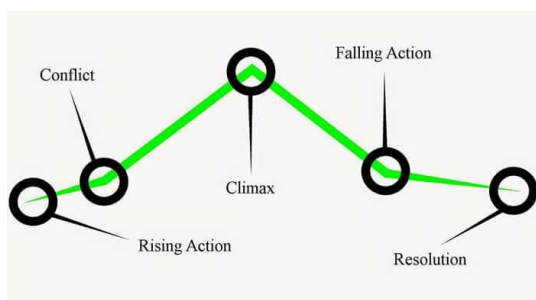


Figure 1. Plot

Next, Setting is another important factor in picture book. As Abrams

(1999) points out, “Who describes setting as the overall general locale, historical time, and social circumstances in which its action occurs”. It means, setting is an important factor for the course of a story where place, time are clearly depicted. Lastly, Point of view is Point of view is a story of a story told by one of the characters in the story. As Abrams (1999) points out, “Signifies point of view as the way the story gets told established by an author by means of which the reader is presented with the characters, dialogue, actions, setting, and events which constitute the narrative in a work of fiction.” It means that showing the perspective of the writer to the reader through the characters in the story, dialogue between the characters, setting, and event of the story.

Illustrative elements consist of line, shape, and color. Line is one of the prominent illustrative elements in the picture book. Daniel Heller (2017) states that,

“You can see a line as one of the basic art elements defined by a point moving in space. This can be two or three-dimensional, descriptive, implied, or abstract. And the line has a width, direction, and length.”

Line is one of the elements in a picture book that can only be explained

from a displacement point. The line can also be two or three dimensions. Furthermore, a line can also be abstract or implied. Shape is the next illustrative element in the picture book. As Daniel Heller (2017) points out, “In a painting, you can also identify shapes two-dimensional, flat, or limited to height and width.” It means, a shape can classify objects in a picture book. Color is an important illustrative element in the picture book. Heller (2017) emphasizes that “One very important art element is color.” It emphasizes that color is important to identify the atmosphere of the objects in a picture book.

Gender stereotype phenomena occur frequently in life, where feminism and masculinity are still often debated. Moreover, there is still no gender equality in which men must be masculine while women must be feminine. According to Butler, gender is a kind of enforced cultural performance, compelled by compulsory heterosexuality, and that, as such, it is performative. This perception is opposing to Heilmen’s view in gender stereotype. “Stereotypes are generalization about groups that are applied to individual group members simply because they belong to that

group, and gender stereotypes are generalizations about the attributes of men and women.” (Heilmen, 2012). It defines that a gender stereotype is a grouping of people based on gender and the attributes they use. Thus, the people know the men and women are alike.

Gender stereotypes can be supposed as a boundary between groups where a group has the same personality besides other groups have different characters from them. As Heilman (2012) points out, “Stereotypes are generalizations about groups that are applied to individual group members simply because they belong to that group, and gender stereotypes are generalizations about the attributes of men and women. This theory explains that every group has different personality and characters.

Masculinity is identical to men who are stronger than women. Butler (1999) defines that,

“Masculinity is taken on by the male homosexual who, presumably, seeks to hide—not from others, but from himself — an ostensible femininity.”

It shows that the man wants to be stronger and they always try to cover up their weaknesses. This theory explains that every man should be strong, and they cannot show their weaknesses to

others. It also means that men are not acceptable if they behave like women.

Feminism is synonymous with women wherein the woman has limitations in behaving or in dealing with something. As Butler (1999) points out, “Feminism is effectively undermined by the constraints of the representational discourse in which it functions.” It means, feminism has limits for women to show something in themselves. This theory explains that every woman must have limits in her attitude or to show herself to others. It also means that women are not acceptable if they behave like men.

Butler (1999) in *Gender Trouble; Feminism and the Subversion Of Identity* opines that the masculine or feminine binary constitutes not only the exclusive framework in which that specificity can be recognized, but in every other way the “specificity” of the feminine is once again fully decontextualized and separated of analytically and politically from the constitution of class, race, ethnicity, and other axes of power relations that both constitute “identity” and make the singular notion of identity a misnomer.

Some studies conducted by scholars. Kurniawati (2012) in her thesis

entitled “A Gender Construction on Cary Fukunaga’s Jane Eyre Movie” applied feminism theory by Bhasin and Khan (2004) to analyze the data. The result showed that the movie exposed gender construction through its narratives and cinematography aspects. The second study was conducted by Anjani (2019) entitled “Gender Stereotype in Moana Illustrated Book”. Anjani used a qualitative approach to comply with the study and used the gender stereotype theory by Nittle (2019) to analyze the data. The result of Anjani’s analyzed illustrated book entitled Moana by Walt Disney Animation Studios. The research aims at describing the opposing characteristic of male and female. Therefore, gender stereotype issues can be scrutinized in the story. Meanwhile, this study views gender stereotype as not as it is a binary.

### 3. METHOD

Methodologically, the data were collected from the pictures and dialogues in Hans Wilhelm’s two selected picture books. After the data were collected, Butler’s theory was used to examine the pictures and dialogues in the picture books. Then, the data were classified into masculinity and/or femininity

characteristics. All the data were explained in essay. The data were presented in the form of utterances and pictures from the book followed by analysis.

#### 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Hans Wilhelm's two selected picture book consists of verbal text and visual text. The story is about a bunny named Ralph who loved soccer more than anything else. The book also represents a male who has the same characteristic as a female in which the issues of gender stereotype; masculinity and femininity are portrayed. Those issues were discussed by examining the gender stereotype and show the differences between masculinity and femininity.

Masculinity and femininity have differences by characterization where male are stronger than female. Thus, this chapter explains how to gender stereotypes portrayed in *Bad, Bad Bunny Trouble* by Hans Wilhelm (1994) and *Bunny Trouble* by Hans Wilhelm (1985) and how to gender binary no longer used as determinant of one's gender.

##### **Ralph's Masculine Characterizations : Playing Soccer and Be Naughty**

The picture books expose how much

Ralph loves playing soccer as can be seen from the narration and the illustration below.

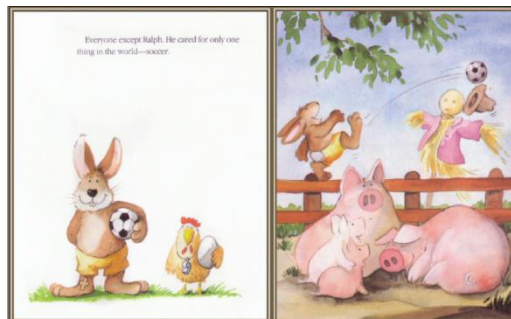


Figure 2. Ralph loves playing soccer and does not care about his

This text shows that Ralph only cares about soccer and he is very happy to play soccer. It can be seen, from his face in the picture and he does not care if playing soccer can injury himself and people around him. It portrays from this quotation, "...He cared for only one thing in the world-soccer." For Ralph, playing soccer is very fun and no one can stop him. Then, he is always playing soccer anywhere possible in his neighborhood. In terms of gender attributes, soccer is identified as masculine play. Soccer is for boys. It emphasizes how Ralph as a boy is masculine enough because he loves playing it. Soccer that is perceived as a masculine attribute is depicted from Ralph who is wearing pants and holding the ball – without a T-shirt on. Then, the

“soccer” is identified as a kind of sport is specifically for male. Moreover, Ralph exhibits that a boy is naughty. Eventually, he performs as a trouble maker. Furthermore, this picture is constructing about gender differences, what and how male usually do, think, and dress, and behave.

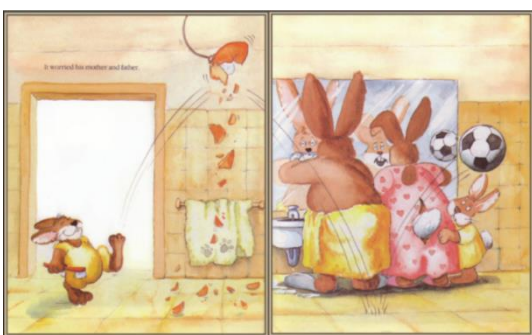


Figure 3. Ralph’s ball hits and breaks things in the house

From this picture, Ralph is making noise by kicking a ball in front of a family. He does not care about the impact after he kicks the ball. He just thinks that playing soccer is very fun for him. It seems that nobody can not to stop him. Then, from the picture Ralph is wearing yellow t-shirt. The color of yellow represents someone who has a cheerful and optimism. It means that Ralph is described as a boy who is happy when he plays soccer. The masculinity is depicted from Ralph who wearing pants. Even though, his mother is wearing a

pink dress and his sister is wearing a yellow dress. Furthermore, the picture shows that gender can be describe from how they dress and the color preferences of their attire. Ralph is wearing pants to indicate that he is a male. The mother and his sister are wearing a dress to indicate they are women. Moreover, pink means feminine color. It also means someone who has a nice nature and tenderness. Furthermore, while kicking the ball Ralph does not care whether it is outside or even in the house. His ball breaks the window. His action shows he is a naughty person.

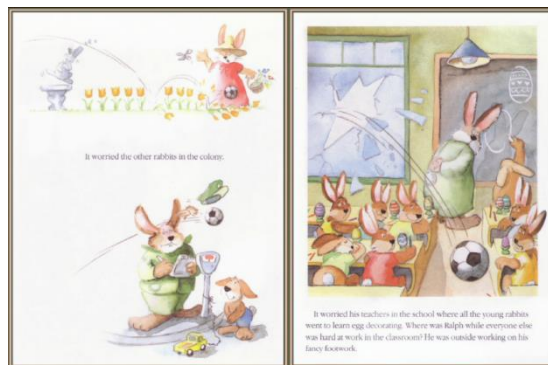


Figure 4. Ralph’s ball hits people and things

Ralph makes everyone become scared because he kicks the ball hitting people around him and damages the facilities. It shows from the quotation, “It worried the other rabbits in the colony”. It means, he scared the rabbits when he was playing soccer. Then, make the



rabbits around him feel uncomfortable. Although, Ralph is unconscious. From the quotation, “It worried his teachers in the school where all the young rabbits went to learn egg decorating...”. It means, the rabbit around him already feel worried when Ralph plays soccer. It shows that, Ralph is annoying and noisy. He does not care about everything around him when he is playing soccer even if it caused a mess and destruction. It can be seen that masculinity attributed to Ralph is not positive. Then, he is so stubborn. He does not realize that he is messing up anything around him.



Figure 5. Ralph's ball keeps troubling the surrounding

Ralph is causing trouble at his sister's birthday party. It shows from this quotation, “It worried his sister Liza—especially when he ruined her birthday party.” It means what Ralph does really make his sister worry and unconscious because Ralph ruins her birthday party. From this picture, Ralph look likes he

does not like about the party and he tries to show it with plays a soccer. It shows that masculinity is depicted by Ralph still plays a soccer which is a sport mostly played by boys during his sister's birthday party. Moreover, still describe as masculinity from his overall because when the party begins he is still wearing pants. Therefore, Ralph looks like strong and independent because in a picture he is alone while his sister together with her family and friends.

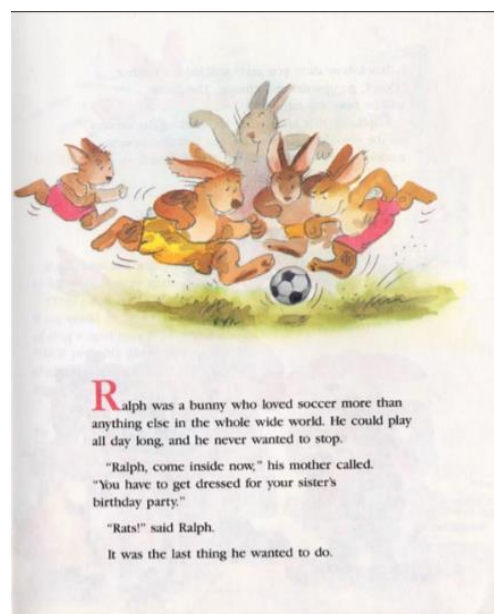


Figure 6. Ralph is crazy about soccer

It can be seen Ralph looks like he is happy when he plays a soccer. Moreover, from this quotation “Ralph was a bunny who loved soccer more than anything else in the whole wide world. He could play all day long, and he never wanted to stop.” It shows that, Ralph is

really eager when he is about to play a soccer. Moreover, he does not care about his hygiene. Masculinity is depicted when Ralph plays soccer with his friends who are all boys highlighting that soccer is a sport that is mostly played by boys. In terms of gender stereotyping, masculinity which can be implied by his friends who wear pants as the indicator masculine gender while dress depicted in this book can be seen as feminine gender. It depicts that there are clear distinctions between two genders overall from their clothes and the color of their clothes. Male characters do not wear T-shirt. They are wearing pants that are not colorful. On the other hand, female characters are shown in playful and colorful dresses.

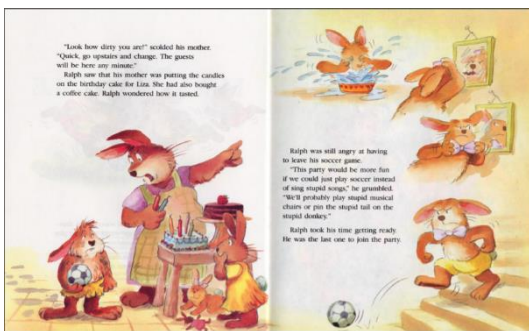


Figure 7. Ralph does not care his look

It can be analyzed that Ralph's mother is getting angry when she is seeing Ralph come home dirty. Moreover, from quotation "Look how dirty you are!". It shows that Ralph's

mother does not like looks Ralph dirty. Furthermore, masculinity is depicted when Ralph does not care about his appearance.

### **Ralph's Feminine Characterizations : Soccer Is For Everybody; Ralph Is Crying**

The picture books expose how soccer is perceived and played not only by Ralph but also by her mother, sister, and the others as can be seen from the following narration and the illustration.

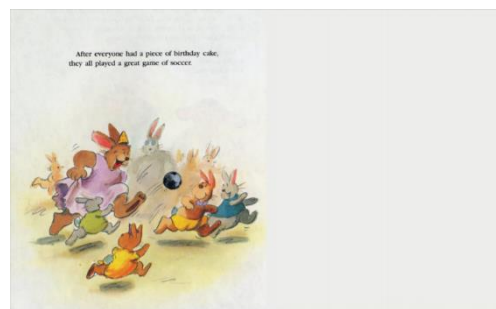


Figure 8. Everybody is playing soccer

It can be seen Ralph and the others play a soccer together. Moreover, from quotation "After everyone had a piece of birthday cake, they all played a great game of soccer." It shows that, Ralph looks happy when he plays soccer together with his sister. Femininity is exposed when his sister plays soccer with the boys. It means that a soccer not only game for the boys but the girls also play that game. Therefore, Ralph's sister shows that she can play soccer like the

boys and she wants to prove if she is strong as the boys.

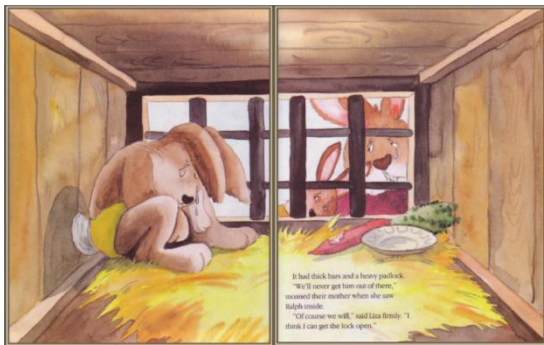


Figure 9. Ralph is caged and crying

Ralph is crying when he is locked in the cage. His mother and sister are trying to open the lock. Moreover, from this quotation “I think I can get the lock open.” It shows that, Ralph’s sister trying how to get Ralph out of the cage. Femininity is depicted when Ralph’s sister tries to lock the cage and she wants to show if she is brave. Furthermore, femininity also exposed when Ralph is crying and feel worry. It shows that Ralph is crying – a feminine attribute, which generally considered as a weakness when a boy cries, not for girls.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

In the beginning, Ralph was scrutinized and therefore exposed as a naughty boy who was a diehard fan of soccer. He kept playing and hitting things and people around him. He caused damage on things in his neighborhood.

Ralph was playing soccer without wearing a shirt. Even after playing soccer, he was dirty and did not care about it at all. Both the illustration and narrative elements in the picture book portray the masculine attributes to Ralph. Meanwhile, his mother and sister were wearing dresses in doing the chores, and preparing a birthday cake. Hereinafter, Ralph was punished for making some damages in the house and neighborhood. For Ralph was crying and felt sorry, he performed the non-binary gender aspects of the main character. The two picture books portray Bunny as a boy who possesses and demonstrates both masculine and feminine characteristics concurrently. This issue criticizes the rigid definition of traditional gender binary that had been inculcated and constructed in the society. By paying attention to the narrative and illustrative elements of the picture books, this essay sheds lights on how Bunny and other supporting characters fervently delineate that gender as fluid aspects rather than rigid characteristics that cannot be possessed and demonstrated by the main character and other characters as well.

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