Reimagining Gender through Picture Books: A Butlerian Reading of Three Children's Narratives

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Abstract

This study investigates the subversion of gender stereotypes in three contemporary children's picture books: *Franny's Father is a Feminist* (2018) by Rhonda Leet, *Mary Wears What She Wants* (2019) by Keith Negley, and *My Shadow is Purple* (2022) by Scott Stuart. Anchored in Judith Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity, the research examines how these texts portray and challenge traditional gender norms. Employing a qualitative descriptive method, the study analyzes both narrative structures and visual representations to uncover how gender identities are constructed, performed, and disrupted within each story. The findings demonstrate that the selected books effectively resist binary conceptions of gender by presenting characters who confront, reject, and redefine societal expectations. Each narrative offers a distinct yet cohesive model of gender subversion—whether through feminist parenting, sartorial defiance, or non-binary self-expression—ultimately encouraging young readers to embrace diversity, autonomy, and equality. This study highlights the critical role of children's literature in shaping gender awareness from an early age and underscores the potential of picture books as tools for promoting inclusivity and challenging normative discourses. The research contributes to ongoing scholarly conversations on gender, identity, and pedagogy in children's literature and calls for further exploration into the impact of such texts in diverse educational and cultural contexts..

Keywords: femininity, gender subversion, gender performativity, gender stereotype, masculinity.

A. Introduction

In contemporary literary and cultural discourse, the dismantling of gender stereotypes has become an increasingly critical concern. As societies strive toward inclusivity and equity, scholars and educators alike have turned their attention to early childhood texts as influential vehicles for shaping young readers' perceptions of identity, gender, and social norms. Picture books, in particular, play a pivotal role in mediating and reproducing cultural expectations. Because of their dual semiotic modes—textual and visual—picture books often function as powerful tools for socialization, transmitting messages about appropriate behaviors, appearances, and roles for boys and girls (Torr, 2018; Crisp & Hiller, 2011). When

106

these books subvert normative expectations, they can become transformative tools for questioning and reimagining gender roles from a young age.

Gender, as defined in the sociocultural tradition, is distinct from biological sex. While sex refers to innate biological characteristics such as chromosomes and reproductive anatomy, gender is socially constructed and maintained through cultural practices and expectations (Butler, 1990; Rahmi, 2019). Gender stereotypes, then, are simplified and widely held beliefs about how individuals should behave based on their perceived gender. These stereotypes often perpetuate hierarchies and limit individual potential—men are expected to be assertive and dominant, while women are seen as nurturing and submissive. Such binaristic frameworks can give rise to sexism and exclusion, particularly when reinforced through institutions like media, education, and literature.

Judith Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity challenges the essentialist view of gender as natural or fixed. Butler posits that gender identity is enacted through repeated performances, which are socially regulated and culturally reinforced. In this view, individuals become gendered not by biology, but by doing—that is, through behaviors that conform (or fail to conform) to cultural expectations. Thus, the repetition of normative gender performances maintains the illusion of a stable identity. Importantly, Butler also suggests that gender can be disrupted and reconfigured when these performances deviate from the norm, allowing space for resistance and redefinition (p. 188).

Although much scholarship has addressed gender representation in adult and young adult fiction, fewer studies have systematically analyzed contemporary picture books through the lens of gender performativity. Prior research has highlighted both the problematic and progressive elements of children's literature (Koss, 2015; Sunderland, 2009), yet there remains a need for focused analysis on how specific texts challenge conventional gender roles. Studies like Crisp et al. (2016) have noted the presence of gender-diverse characters in recent children's literature, but deeper theoretical engagement is still limited—particularly in relation to Butlerian concepts.

To address this gap, the present study explores the subversion of gender stereotypes in three selected picture books: *Franny's Father is a Feminist* (2018) by Rhonda Leet, *Mary Wears What She Wants* (2019) by Keith Negley, and *My Shadow is Purple* (2022) by Scott Stuart. Each of these books presents protagonists who challenge traditional gender expectations through their choices, appearances, or self-expression. In *Franny's Father is a Feminist*, the father figure models egalitarian parenting and affirms his daughter's agency beyond normative femininity. *Mary Wears What She Wants*, inspired by 19th-century trailblazer Mary Edwards Walker, celebrates bodily autonomy and social resistance through sartorial defiance. Finally, *My Shadow is Purple* centers on a child whose nonbinary identity is symbolized through a multicolored shadow, challenging the binary constructs of pink and blue, girl and boy.

The analysis adopts a qualitative textual and visual approach, informed by Butler's theory of performativity, to examine how these books both reflect and resist dominant gender ideologies. Specifically, the study investigates how the characters perform gender in ways that subvert norms and how these performances might shape young readers' understandings of identity and self-expression.

By engaging with this emerging body of literature, the research aims to contribute to discussions on the pedagogical and ideological potential of children's literature in disrupting gender binaries. It also offers insights for educators, parents, and authors interested in promoting gender-inclusive narratives for early readers. Ultimately, the study underscores how picture books can act not only as mirrors of societal change but also as active agents in the transformation of cultural norms.

B. Method

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach to examine the subversion of gender stereotypes in three selected children's picture books: *Franny's Father is a Feminist* (2018) by Rhonda Leet, *Mary Wears What She Wants* (2019) by Keith Negley, and *My Shadow is Purple* (2022) by Scott Stuart. As Patton (2002) emphasizes, qualitative methods are essential for interpreting complex human experiences and social realities. This approach is particularly suitable for literary and visual analysis, as it allows for in-depth engagement with both textual content and illustrations. Denzin and Lincoln (2007) describe qualitative research as interpretive and naturalistic, aiming to understand phenomena within their real-world contexts. The data source comprises the full narratives and accompanying illustrations of the three picture books, selected purposively for their explicit engagement with gender nonconformity and thematic alignment with the research focus. These texts offer rich material for analyzing how traditional gender roles are both represented and resisted. Data collection was conducted through systematic close readings of the texts. Each book was read multiple times to identify instances where gender stereotypes are either reinforced or subverted. Annotations were made on both verbal and visual elements, and relevant excerpts were coded into thematic categories such as character traits, clothing, behavior, and social responses. Data analysis was guided by Judith Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity. The selected data were examined to determine how gender is enacted, contested, and redefined through performative acts in both the narrative structure and illustrations. The results are presented in essay form, integrating textual evidence with critical interpretation.

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C. Findings and Discussion

Society often stereotypes femininity and masculinity as defining characteristics of someone's gender identity, creating rigid boundaries about how individuals should behave and present themselves based on their gender. Femininity is often associated with gentleness, nurture, and grace, while masculinity is associated with strength, courage, and dominance. These stereotypes create social expectations that often limit individuals' ability to embrace themselves. For example, men who show gentleness deemed "feminine" are often seen as incompetent in their role as men. Likewise, women who display toughness or ambition are often stigmatized for being too "masculine." These categorizations not only reduce the diversity of gender expression but also reinforce social structures that limit the potential. In reality, femininity and masculinity are not simply biological attributes but rather social constructs that should be redefined to create a stereotype-free society.

1. Gender Stereotypes

1.1. *Franny's Father is A Feminist* (2018) by Rhonda Leet

The first book analyzed is *Franny's Father Is a Feminist (2018).* Written by Rhonda Leet and illustrated by Megan Walker, *Franny's Father is a Feminist* (2018) raises the issue of feminism. This book is about gender stereotypes and how the characters take subversive actions against the stereotypes they face. It tells the story of a little girl and her father, who is a feminist. The father teaches that women can do anything men can do.
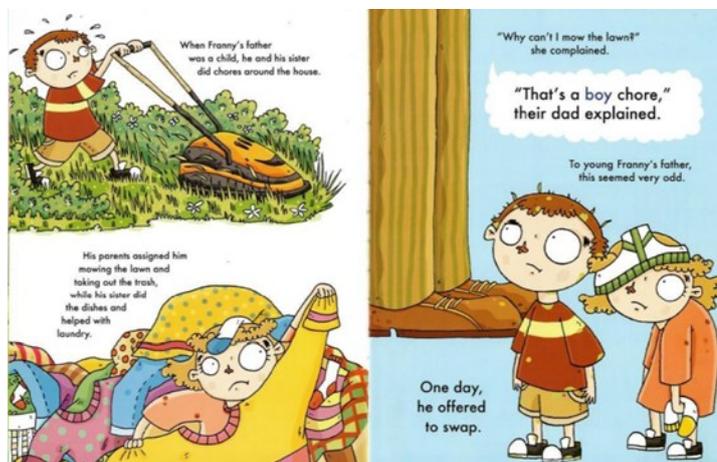
Picture 1.1 Franny's father and his sister as children were given household responsibilities by their parents based on their gender, as found in *Franny's Father is a Feminist* (P. 4), by Rhonda Leet, 2018.

This illustration shows Franny's father and his sister as children. They were given household responsibilities by their parents. Franny's father was tasked with taking out the trash and mowing the lawn, while his sister was assigned to wash the dishes and do the laundry. However, his sister felt this was unfair. She wanted to mow the lawn, too. She complained to her parents and said, "Why can't I mow the lawn?" (Leet, 2018, p. 4). Her father replied, "That is a boy's chore" (Leet, 2018, p. 4). Chores are often categorized as either "men's work" or "women's work." The

situation above is an example of how gender-based task assignments occur within the family environment. Tasks that involve operating heavy equipment, like mowing the lawn, are typically assigned to men, and women are often perceived as lacking the capacity to handle such work. On the other hand, lighter tasks are seen as belonging to women, and men who do the types of that tasks may be viewed as less masculine. So it is concluded that what happened to Franny's father is a form of masculinity, and his sister is a form of femininity. Butler (1990) explains that traditional norms that assign certain types of work to specific genders can restrict individuals' social and economic roles (p. 95). When these patterns are repeated, they reinforce the idea that some jobs are suited to one gender. It will lead to gender inequality and limiting individual expression and opportunities.

1.2. *Mary Wears What She Wants* (2019) by Keith Negley

Picture 1.2 Women are prohibited from wearing trousers, found in *Mary Wears What She Wants* (p. 1 - p.2), by Keith Negley, 2019.

This page clearly shows the gender stereotypes about clothes. On the page above, it is illustrated that at that time, women were prohibited from wearing pants. The picture shows men wearing suits and pants while women wear dresses. Both adults and children are not free from these rules. It is seen how little Mary wears a dress while some boys wear pants. Likewise, each man wears accessories such as hats that are the same shape as other men, while women wear the same accessories as other women. It shows that there is a categorization in terms of clothing between men and women. "Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (Butler, 1990, p. 33). In this view, the division of clothing into men's and women's categories is not natural, but part of social norms.

Picture 1.4 Mary starts to wear pants and she faces significant backlash from those around her, found in *Mary Wears What She Wants* (p. 11 - p. 12), Keith Negley, 2019.

On pages 11 and 12, Mary is shown boldly following her desire to wear pants. She walks proudly, her head held high, confidently displaying her choice. However, achieving her desire is not without challenges. Mary faces significant backlash from those around her. Some people glance at her with cynicism, worry, or surprise, and her brave actions quickly become the talk of the town. The other character depicts a father covering his son's eyes to shield him from seeing Mary because her behaviour is perceived as a violation of social norms and inappropriate attire. Another character, an adult man, is shown angrily pointing at Mary, emphasizing disapproval of Mary's behaviour. These reactions highlight the resistance from men, who view Mary's decision as threatening. The men do not want girls to wear pants because pants are a symbol of masculinity, explaining their anger and refusal to accept women wearing them. The depiction of Mary facing protests from society illustrates how social structures enforce gender norms, creating hierarchies in which masculinity is considered dominant.

Picture 1.5 Mary also gets harsh words related to her brave action of wearing pants, found in *Mary Wears What She Wants* (p. 13, p. 14), by Keith Negley, 2019.

This page depicts a more extreme rejection of Mary's behaviour. The people around her are seen as angry and pointing at Mary. Some of them are even throwing eggs at Mary. Some of the thrown eggs are landing on Mary's body. In addition, Mary also gets harsh words related to her brave action of wearing pants. They say, "You are gonna regret wearing pants, Mary Walker" (Negley, 2019, p. 13). These rejections do not only come from men but also from women. Mary receives

discrimination and intimidation due to her resistance to gender stereotypes. What Mary receives for her behaviour aligns with Butler's (1990) words in her book. According to Butler (1990), the subversion of gender norms can lead to violence, both physical and psychological. Individuals who demonstrate unconventional gender behaviour often experience violence. (p. 167). It shows the unwillingness or inability of society to accept differences and prefers to carry out traditional norms that they have held for a long time.

Picture 1.6 Mary received protests and intimidation with various harsh words, found in *Mary Wears What She Wants* (p. 23 - p. 24), by Keith Negley, 2019.

The next day, Mary wore pants again. She was hesitant about wearing a dress again because she received an inadequate response when wearing pants. The reactions of the people around her were now getting worse. Mary received protests with various harsh words such as "shame on you," "not cool," and "go home." However, Mary proudly walked wearing her pants. She ignored the protests of the people around her. Butler (1990) explains that people who violate traditional norms often experience social stigma and discrimination in various aspects of life (p. 48). The surrounding community will consider them deviant because they do not follow the existing rules. It results in alienation, and the individual may experience difficulties in everyday life.

Picture 1.7 The protests against Mary's actions, found in *Mary Wears What She Wants* (p. 25 - p. 26), by Keith Negley, 2019.

This page depicts ongoing protests against Mary's actions. Now, the protests have even reached her school. When Mary arrived, she saw people demonstrating

against her decision to wear pants. Some held posters with messages such as, "Real girls wear dresses!" "No pants!" and "Dresses forever!" The protests made it hard for Mary to enter the school, as the crowd blocked her way. Witnessing these actions, Mary began to worry that the situation would continue to escalate.

The events described and illustrated on this page align with Butler's (1990) perspective on the social consequences faced by individuals who challenge traditional norms. Butler explains that breaking gender norms often leads to stigma, intimidation, and discrimination, making it difficult for individuals to navigate areas such as work, education, or public services (p. 48). This page highlights how Mary, by daring to defy gender norms, faces significant obstacles to reaching her education.

1.3. *My Shadow is Purple* (2022) by Scott Stuart

The third book analyzed is *My Shadow is Purple* by Scott Stuart. This book was published in 2022 and raises the theme of equality, diversity, stereotypes, and self-love. This book shows how the character deals with gender stereotypes. At first, he only saw the world in pink and blue. Pink is a colour associated with women, and blue is a colour associated with men. However, the main character questions why he has to choose between pink and blue when he believes everyone should be able to do everything without being limited by stereotypes that categorize life into only two colours: pink and blue.

Picture 1.8 The boy realized that his father's shadow was blue and his mother's was pink, while his was different, purple, found in *My Shadow is Purple* (p. 1 – p. 2), by Scott Stuart, 2022.

On the first and second pages, a boy is illustrated observing his father and mother. He sees that his father has a blue shadow and his mother has a pink shadow. Blue is associated with a male colour, and pink is a female colour. The boy then sees how the environment stereotypes everything into only 2 categories. If it belongs to pink, then blue cannot touch it. And vice versa. He feels that he cannot categorize himself into only one colour because he likes things that can be both male and female things.

This page illustrates the binary framework explained by Butler (1990). Butler (1990) explains that the binary framework is a system that divides everything into

only two categories, male and female or masculine and feminine (p. 178). Furthermore, Butler (1990) states that this binary framework concept results in the separation of categories and produces gender stereotypes that make individuals feel they must meet social expectations and limit self-expression (p. 187).

Picture 1.9 Stereotypes about blue being the strongest and pink being the most caring, found in *My Shadow is Purple* (p. 8 – p. 9), by Scott Stuart, 2022.

This page clarifies the categorization between pink and blue. On this page, activities that represent male activities are illustrated in blue, namely soccer, and then female activities in pink, namely ballet. Then, on the next page, stereotypes about blue and pink are clearly shown. "Some tell me I'm blue, only blue can be strong. Some tell me I'm pink because pink's the most caring" (Stuart, 2022, p. 9). Both sentences clearly show gender stereotypes for each colour. The colour blue, which represents men, is considered the strongest, and then the colour pink, which represents women, is considered the most caring.

This kind of gender stereotype is a problem that is rooted in society. This arises because repeated behaviour creates the social construction and strengthens the social structure. According to Butler (1990), the binary framework strengthens the social structure and creates a hierarchy of power that supports patriarchy (p. 95). Stereotypes about men as strong creatures and women as gentle creatures form the assumption that men are superior and women are inferior. In the end, this assumption will lead to gender bias and injustice if subversion is not carried out.
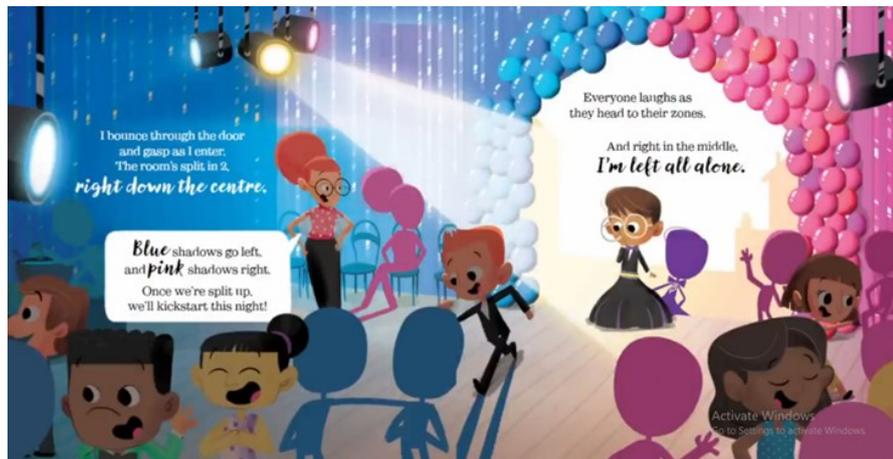
Picture 1.10 The boy finds the room divided into two parts: pink and blue, found in My Shadow is Purple (p. 15 – p. 16), by Scott Stuart, 2022.

Another depiction of stereotypes occurs when the main character enters the party room. He finds the room divided into two parts: pink and blue. In the room, everyone laughs and enjoys the event in their own zones. Meanwhile, the main character feels isolated and alone because he does not choose to do only one of the blue or pink activities. "And right in the middle, I'm left all alone" (Stuart, 2022, p. 16). This incident proves that stereotypes that categorize everything into only two categories will alienate individuals who are not included in a particular category. In addition, gender stereotypes prevent individuals from expressing themselves because existing social norms limit them. "The tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of those productions—and the punishments that attend not agreeing to believe in them." (Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 1990, p. 179). She argues that by labeling certain behaviors or identities as inappropriate for one's assigned gender, stereotypes act as tools of control, making people fear deviation and hide authentic aspects of themselves.

2. Gender Subversion

2.1. *Franny's Father is A Feminist* (2018) by Rhonda Leet
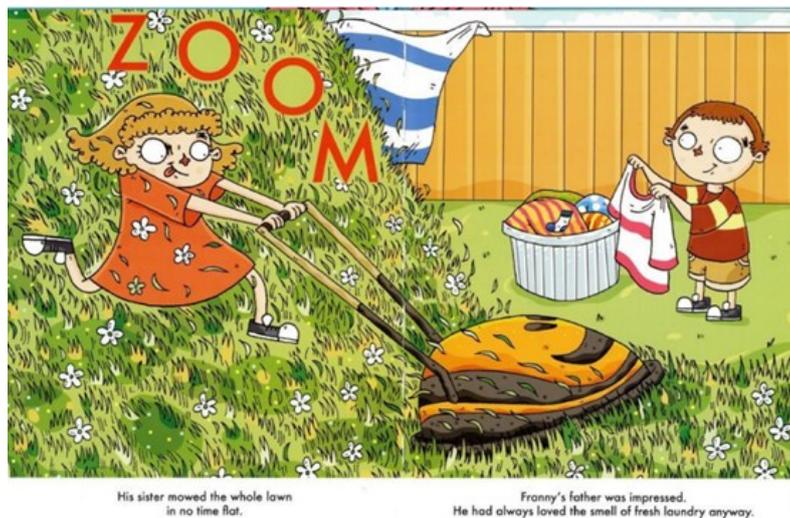
Picture 2.1 He allowed his sister to mow the lawn while Franny's father did the laundry, found in *Franny's Father is A Feminist* (p. 5 – p. 6), by Rhonda Leet, 2018.

Feeling disapproving of his father's words about girls' and boys' chores, Franny's father finally asked his sister to swap tasks. He allowed his sister to mow the lawn while Franny's father did the laundry. He was very impressed to see his sister break their father's words that mowing the lawn was a boy's chore, but his sister could do it well. In addition, Franny's father enjoyed the fresh smell of laundry while washing. What Franny's father and her sister did on this page illustrates the gender subversion mentioned by Butler (1990). According to Butler (1990), gender subversion is an effort to fight rigid gender norms (p. 152). This opinion is evident in the actions of Franny's father and her sister, who subverted gender norms that were considered fixed.

Picture 2.2 Franny's father allows Franny to do any job without being limited by rigid gender roles, found in *Franny's Father is A Feminist* (p. 7), by Rhonda Leet, 2018.

Based on his childhood experience of gender stereotypes, Franny's father is determined to become a feminist. He highly upholds gender equality in his family and allows Franny to do any job without being limited by rigid gender roles. On this page, Franny is allowed and taught by her father to sort tools from the workbench. The subversion depicted on this page is resistance to traditional gender roles. Work related to automotive tools is identified with men's occupation. In *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler argues about girl's or boy's tasks "If gender is constructed, then perhaps it is not necessarily constructed in a way that sustains traditional binary relations. The task is not whether to repeat, but how to repeat and, through a radical proliferation of gender, to displace the very terms of identity." (*Gender Trouble*, 1990, p. 148). However, her father teaches Franny to do it so that she can develop her potential without being limited by gender norms.

This is Franny's mother.
She has an important job.
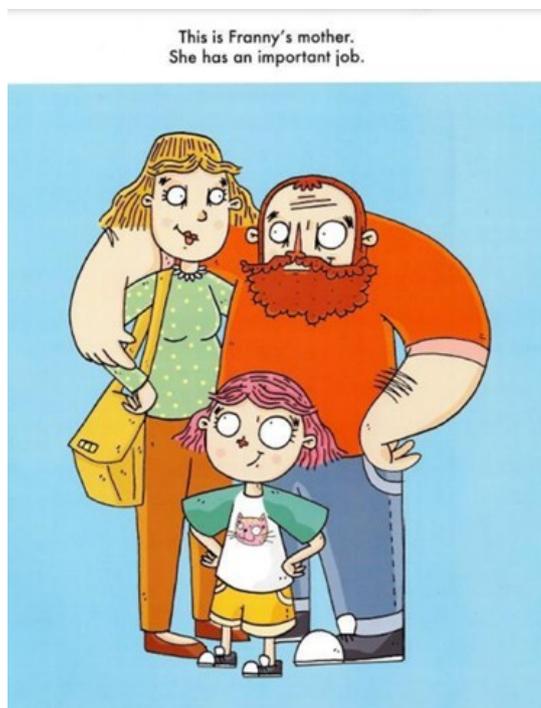
Picture 2.3 Franny's mother is a working mom while Franny's father spends more time at home, handles domestic work, and takes care of Franny's needs, found in *Franny's Father is A Feminist* (p. 13), by Rhonda Leet, 2018.

This page shows that Franny's mother is a working mom while Franny's father spends more time at home, handles domestic work, and takes care of Franny's needs. Franny's father and mother divide household tasks based on mutual agreement, not based on traditional gender roles. In traditional gender roles, women are usually required to stay home and care for all household needs, including raising children, while men must work as breadwinners. However, these traditional norms limit the movement of women with great potential to work in the professional field. This page provides further proof that Franny's family is feminist. They fight gender norms that are considered fixed and cannot be changed. This family proves that women can do everything men can do and vice versa. Franny's family subverts

117

gender stereotypes to create a gender-friendly family. Butler argues that what we consider to be "feminine" or "masculine" roles, like women being caregivers or men being breadwinners, are not natural or biologically determined, but socially constructed and performed. "Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance" (*Gender Trouble*, 1990, p. 33)
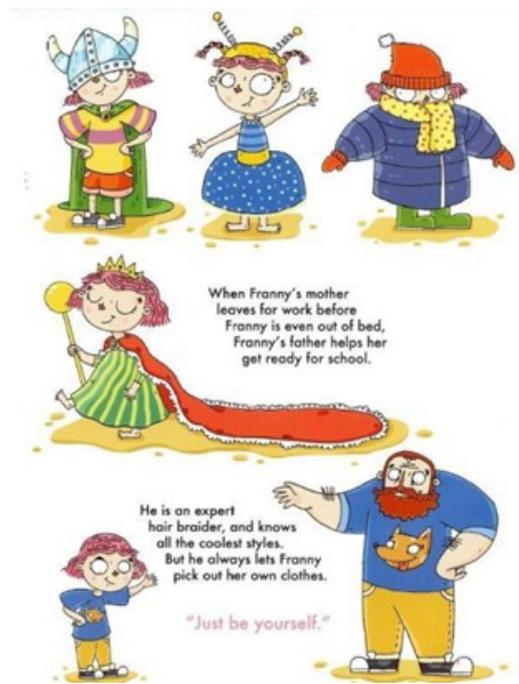
Picture 2.4 Franny's father is skilled at styling Franny's hair and clothes, found in *Franny's Father is A Feminist* (p. 14), by Rhonda Leet, 2018.

This page illustrates Franny trying on different styles of clothing and hair. Her father is very skilled in helping Franny get ready for school. "When Franny's mother leaves for work before Franny is even out of bed, Franny's father helps her get ready for school. He is an expert hair braider and knows all the coolest styles. However, he always lets Franny pick out her clothes." (Leet, 2018, p. 14). This indicates that Franny's father is a man who does not hesitate to break gender stereotypes. He does jobs that are taboo for men without hesitation. He can style Franny's hair and even give her style options, although, in the end, her father still lets her choose which style of clothing she likes. He says, "Just be yourself." (Leet, 2018, p. 14). Franny's father breaks gender performances, becoming the opposite of what has been rooted in society. His actions prove that gender roles created by repeated actions can be changed. Franny's father's active involvement in domestic tasks not only teaches his daughter but also challenges traditional gender stereotypes within the modern family. This strengthens Butler's argument that subversion of the private sphere can have an impact on broader societal norms.

2.2. *Mary Wears What She Wants* (2019) by Keith Negley
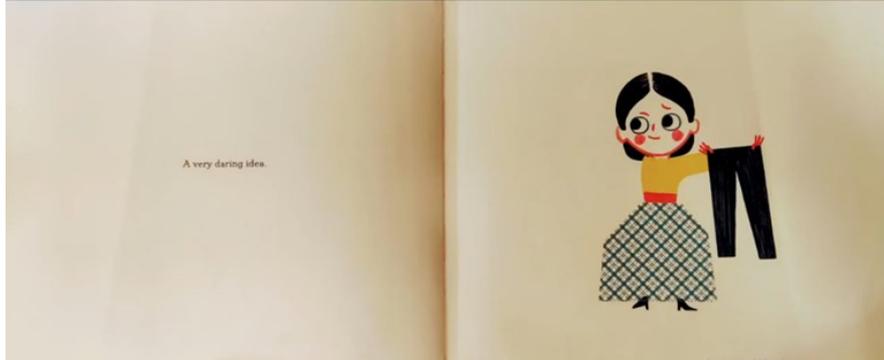
Picture 2.5 Mary felt uncomfortable wearing a dress, so she dared to wear pants, found in *Mary Wears What She Wants* (p.8), by Keith Negley, 2019.

This page shows Mary's transition from wearing a dress to wanting to change into pants. She felt uncomfortable wearing a dress, so she dared to wear pants. At that time, women were prohibited from wearing pants because it violated the established rules. Dress for girls and pants for boys. However, Mary bravely challenged the rules so her body could move freely. Mary's action against the flow of social norms is a gender subversion. Butler (1990) explains that by dressing outside of established gender norms, individuals can express their identities more fluidly (p. 44). Her courage opened the way for greater freedom of expression for herself and other women who wanted to experience the same freedom.

Picture 2.6 Mary now finds that what she wears is something she must choose for herself, not determined by others, found in *Mary Wears What She Wants* (p. 21 – p. 22), by Keith Negley, 2019.

Despite the rejection of her actions in wearing pants, Mary did not give up. She decided to continue wearing pants for her daily activities. This page describes Mary's belief, supported by her father, so that she would be confident in facing the reactions of society. "The next morning, Mary decided she did not like being told what to wear" (Negley, 2019, p. 22). Mary now finds that what she wears is something she must choose for herself, not determined by others. The subversion

that Mary does is by realizing that gender identity is formed through social and cultural practices. After realizing this, little Mary can liberate herself from restrictive social expectations.

Picture 2.7 Mary boldly and courageously confronts the criticism of those who oppose her for wearing pants, found in *Mary Wears What She Wants* (p. 28 – p. 29), by Keith Negley, 2019.

On this page, young Mary boldly and courageously confronts the criticism of those who oppose her for wearing pants. She directly challenges the stereotype that pants are only for boys. When society tries to intimidate Mary by accusing her of wearing boys' clothes, Mary replies loudly and confidently, "I'm not wearing boys' clothes. I'm wearing my clothes! If you will excuse me, please, I am late for school" (Negley, 2019, p. 28). Mary's response reflects an extraordinary act of courage. She rejects the traditional rules that limit gender expression. She shows that clothing is part of individual freedom, not just a symbol controlled by social norms. Butler (1990) explains that actions that violate gender norms often provoke strong reactions from society because they feels threatened by the change. This intimidation and violence are a defence against the traditional system they want to maintain (p. 162). As a young child, Mary is subverting and demonstrating that fighting against gender stereotypes requires extraordinary courage, even when facing significant risks.

Picture 2.8 Mary is overjoyed to see that her courage to challenge restrictive gender norms has inspired her friends to follow her example and wear pants too, found in *Mary Wears What She Wants* (p. 34 – p. 35), by Keith Negley, 2019.

This page shows Mary with her friends and her teacher, but the scene is not just ordinary. Mary is overjoyed to see that her courage to challenge restrictive gender norms has inspired her friends to follow her example and wear pants, too. Although Mary faced significant challenges and unpleasant consequences for standing up to these norms, she ultimately achieved her goal. This page also highlights the impact of gender subversion. Gender subversion does not just affect individuals; it also influences society as a whole. Butler (1990) explained that acts of gender subversion can disrupt existing social structures, paving the way for greater gender equality (p. 95). In Mary's case, she confronted gender stereotypes and did subversive actions by defying traditional expectations. Her bravery not only earned her the freedom to dress as she wanted but also encouraged others around her to embrace that same freedom.

2.3. *My Shadow is Purple* (2022) by Scott Suart

Picture 2.9 The characters fight against stereotypes attached to objects, found in *My Shadow is Purple* (p. 3 – p. 4), by Scott Stuart, 2022.

This page depicts how the main character shows that his shadow is not affected by the stereotypes attached to one of the colors. For him, there is no difference between pink and blue or girls and boys. "My shadow loves playing with all sorts of toys. Things loved by girls and things loved by boys" (Stuart, 2022, p. 4). The sentence shows that he does everything he wants to do without being limited by restrictive rules. The picture shows the boy holding a robot toy in his right hand and a princess toy in his left hand. The illustration implies that toys have no gender. Everyone can play with whatever toys they like.

The main character in the book *My Shadow is Purple* (2022) by Scott Stuart fights against stereotypes attached to objects. He ignores what other people usually do, such as categorizing objects into male or female. According to Butler (1990), eliminating gender stereotypes on objects will create space for more diverse expressions of identity (p. 187). What the boy does in this story aligns with what Butler (1990) explained. The boy in this book creates a more complimentary space

121

for expression without being bound by the obligation to fulfill social expectations about male or female things. The purple color representing the main character's shadow becomes a visual symbol of gender fluidity. This supports Butler's view that gender identity can exist outside of rigid binary categories, allowing individuals to negotiate their identities through their actions and choices.

Picture 2.10 The boy plays ballet with children who have pink shadows and plays ball with children who have blue shadows, found in *My Shadow is Purple* (p. 5 – p. 6), by Scott Stuart, 2022.

The main character in this book also disrupts gender stereotypes in activities. On this page, the main character can do all activities previously associated only with one gender. He does ballet with children who have pink shadows and plays ball with children who have blue shadows. Ballet is considered a feminine activity intended for girls, and soccer is a masculine activity for boys. However, this boy breaks all these stereotypes. "I dance with the pinks as they turn and they spin. And play sport with the blues as they lose and win" (Stuart, 2022, p. 5). This sentence also indicates that this boy can do all activities regardless of the stereotypes attached to the activity. He frees himself from being limited to rigid gender norms. As Butler (1990) said, breaking gender stereotypes in human activities can contribute to broader social change (p. 27). This will lead humans to gender justice because gender discrimination will start to disappear.

Picture 2.11 Men are considered strong creatures and are prohibited from showing their feelings to others, and women are considered gentle creatures and need to be guarded so that they cannot do quite heavy physical activities, found in *My Shadow is Purple* (p. 7 – p. 8), by Scott Stuart, 2022.

On this page, the mother, with a pink shadow, is illustrated lifting weights, and the father, with a blue shadow, is crying because he is watching a television show. Based on existing gender stereotypes, men are considered strong creatures and are prohibited from showing their feelings to others. Then, women are considered gentle creatures and need to be guarded so that they cannot do heavy physical activities. "Some tell me I'm blue. Only blue can be strong. But my Mum's strong too, so I think they're wrong" (Stuart, 2022, p. 8). This sentence describes how women are associated with gentle things, but the mother breaks it, and it turns out she can lift heavy objects. "Some tell me I'm pink 'cause pink's the most caring. But Dad's always crying, and loving, and sharing" (Stuart, 2022, p. 8). This sentence shows the stereotype that men are not allowed to cry because crying is a female trait. However, on this page, the father also denies this stereotype. The father cries while watching a sad television show. This section shows that men can also cry because of their sadness, and other emotions are not only for women. Men are also human beings with feelings, so it is okay to cry or show their feelings to others.

Seeing the pictures of the father and mother, who do not categorize activities based on gender stereotypes, the boy finally realizes that no one is more important than the other. Everyone is equal and can do any activity because activities do not have gender rules. Everyone can do ballet and play soccer without having to choose one. According to Butler (1990), the heteronormative system that regulates and limits human activities based on gender can be destroyed by challenging traditional norms so that individuals can explore activities without being bound by traditional norms. In other words, activities or jobs should not be stereotyped by any gender because it will limit the potential of each individual.

Picture 2.12 Every human can have different choices, and it does not matter because everyone has the same rights, found in *My Shadow is Purple* (p. 27 – p. 28), by Scott Stuart, 2022.

This page illustrates that the color of each person's shadow can be different and varied. "My shadow is red." "Mine's silver!" "Mine's green!" "Mine's violet!" "Mine's aquamarine!" "Mine's orange!" (Stuart, 2022, p. 27 and p. 28). This sentence reveals that every human can have different choices, and it does not matter because everyone has the same rights. According to Butler (1990), identity diversity is understanding identity as dynamic and complex, shaped by social interactions and cultural practices (p. 179). That means categorizing human identity cannot be arranged in a rigid and restrictive way because of the dynamic and complex nature of humans. So, it can be concluded that this page reveals the results of gender subversion carried out by the main character. The boy fights against heteronormativity, which categorizes everything into only two categories so that humans are expected only to choose and fulfill one of them. However, this boy dares to break the rules by doing whatever he likes without caring about traditional norms, so everyone dares to accept and explore themselves in various colors.

D. Conclusion

Based on the data analysis, the findings indicate that the selected picture books effectively subvert conventional gender stereotypes by portraying characters who challenge societal norms. Franny's Father is a Feminist (2018) redefines masculinity through a nurturing father figure who embraces feminist values, modeling an egalitarian family structure. Mary Wears What She Wants (2019) celebrates individuality and defiance of restrictive dress codes, while My Shadow is Purple (2022) introduces a non-binary character whose fluid identity disrupts gender binaries and promotes inclusivity. Each book demonstrates how characters confront gendered expectations and transform resistance into empowerment, illustrating Judith Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity in accessible and age-appropriate narratives.

Importantly, these books hold pedagogical value for educators and parents. Teachers can use them to foster critical discussions about gender, inclusion, and identity in the classroom, while parents may employ them to cultivate openness and empathy at home. Publishers, in turn, are encouraged to support literature that reflects diverse gender expressions and challenges heteronormative assumptions.

However, this study is not without limitations. The analysis is restricted to only three texts, which may not capture the full scope of gender representation in contemporary children's literature. Future research could expand the corpus to include books from varied cultural contexts or explore audience reception through classroom observations or reader interviews.

The selected books not only subvert gender stereotypes but also demonstrate the transformative potential of picture books in shaping inclusive attitudes. These texts show that children's literature can serve as a powerful medium for challenging societal norms and nurturing a more equitable, gender-aware generation. Further research is needed to deepen understanding of how such texts influence young readers' perceptions and behaviors.

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