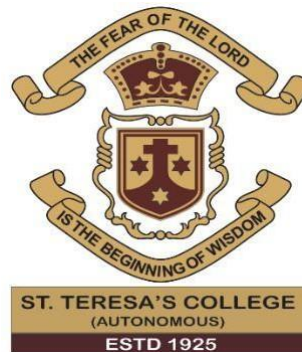


**UNVEILING THE GENDERED WORLD OF  
CHILDREN'S LITERATURE:  
A CASE STUDY OF THE *FAMOUS FIVE* SERIES**



*Project submitted to St. Teresa's College (Autonomous) in partial fulfilment of  
the requirement for the degree of BACHELOR OF ARTS in  
English Language and Literature*

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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this project titled “Unveiling the Gendered World of Children's Literature: A Case Study of the *Famous Five Series*” is the record of bona fide work done by me under the guidance and supervision of Mrs. Tessa Fani Jose, Assistant Professor, Department of English.

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## CERTIFICATE

I hereby declare that this project entitled “Unveiling the Gendered World of Children's Literature: A Case Study of the *Famous Five Series*” by Treesa Thomas Payyanat is a record of bona fide work carried out by her under my supervision and guidance.

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## List of Abbreviations

FGAA	<i>Five Go Adventuring Again</i>
FTI	<i>Five on a Treasure Island</i>
FRAT	<i>Five Run Away Together</i>

## Introduction

Children are the future because they are the next generation of leaders, thinkers, and decision-makers. They will shape the world in which we live, and it is important that they are given the tools, resources, and opportunities to do so in a positive and meaningful way. Children are also the future in terms of human development. They are constantly learning and growing, and the experiences they have during their childhood will shape the adults they become. It is crucial that children have access to good education, healthy food, and proper healthcare, as well as a safe and supportive environment in which to grow and thrive. By investing in children and providing them with the necessary resources, we are investing in the future of our society and the world. We are helping to ensure that future generations will have the ability to create a better world for everyone.

Children's books play an important role in shaping children's understanding of gender roles and stereotypes. The books that they read when they are younger can impact the type of person they will be when they are older. It builds their morals and values.

Research has shown that children's books often reinforce traditional gender roles and stereotypes, with male characters often portrayed as strong and dominant, and female characters often portrayed as weak and submissive. Such representations can constrain children's capacity to challenge gender norms and may even lead them to impose such notions onto others.

It is important for parents, educators, and librarians to carefully select children's books that promote positive and diverse representation of gender

and expose them to a variety of books that represent diverse perspectives and experiences. This can help children develop a more inclusive and accepting understanding of gender.

The *Famous Five* is a series of children's adventure novels written by Enid Blyton. The series, which consists of twenty-one books, was first published in 1942 and has since become one of the most popular and beloved children's book series of all time. The series follows the adventures of a group of five friends: Julian, Dick, Anne, George, and Timmy the dog, as they spend their summer holidays together, solving mysteries and having fun.

The books are set in the English countryside and are known for their sense of adventure and exploration. They are also known for their strong sense of morality and for promoting traditional values such as honesty, loyalty, and teamwork.

The books have been translated into many languages and have been enjoyed by millions of children around the world. They continue to be popular to this day and are considered a classic. Many people who read the series as children continue to have fond memories of the books and often read them to their own children.

“In India, especially, her [Enid Blyton] popularity soared. An entire generation of Indians grew up on a steady diet of Blyton in the 80s and 90s, especially at a time when there were few other children's books available and libraries tended to stock more British authors than any other nationality” (Thiagarajan). Her stories and characters, such as the *Famous Five* and *Secret Seven*, resonated with Indian readers, particularly children and young adults.



The books also provided a sense of nostalgia for a simpler time and place, which was appealing to readers in India during a period of rapid modernization.

According to Thomas Abraham, the managing director of Hachette India, Enid Blyton is a highly successful and enduring author, with her work remaining popular even today. He notes that she is currently the third highest-selling children's author in India, behind J.K. Rowling and Jeff Kinney. However, if sales of all her books over the course of her seventy-year career were taken into account, she would likely be the highest-selling author of all time. Her *Famous Five* series alone sells over two hundred fifty thousand copies annually, with her *Secret Seven* series also selling over one hundred thousand copies each year.

The series *Famous Five* features five main characters: Julian, Dick, Anne, Georgina (George) and Timmy the dog. The two boys are often portrayed as being more adventurous and independent, while Anne is often depicted as being less capable and in need of protection. George, who is a girl, is also portrayed as being more tomboyish and less traditionally feminine. The series perpetuates traditional gender stereotypes and does not provide strong female role models for young readers. This is not good for young impressionable readers.

The purpose of the project is to understand gender construction in children's books, specifically in the *Famous Five* series, based on the gender theories by Judith Butler and to evaluate its impact on the various age groups of readers. Judith Butler is a renowned philosopher and gender theorist who is

best known for her work on the social construction of gender, and the performativity of gender identity and her book *Gender Trouble* has had a significant impact on feminist and queer theory. In simple terms, she argues that gender is not something that is inherent or natural, but rather it is something that is constructed and performed through social interactions and societal expectations.

The project tries to analyse the series and the gender issues it raises using Judith Butler's theories along with the result of the survey conducted. Chapter One outlines the theoretical foundations for the examination of the representation of gender in the classic children's series *Famous Five*. The chapter begins by introducing the concept of performativity, which refers to the idea that gender is not something that is inherent or fixed, but rather something that is constantly being performed and constructed through repeated actions and behaviours. The concept of citationality is also discussed, which refers to the ways in which gender is constructed through the repetition and citation of past acts and performances. The chapter then examines the concept of abjection, which refers to the process by which certain individuals or groups are marginalized and excluded from dominant cultural norms and practices. This theory is particularly relevant to the analysis of gender representation in the *Famous Five* series as it helps to understand how the series reinforces societal norms and stereotypes about gender and how it constructs and reinforces social boundaries around gender.

Overall, the theories of performativity, citationality and abjection provide a framework for understanding how gender is constructed, performed,

and reinforced in the series, and how it could shape the readers understanding and expectations of gender.

In chapter two, an analysis of the representation of gender in the classic children's series *Famous Five* has been carried out. The series, written by Enid Blyton between 1942 and 1963, follows the adventures of a group of five children as they solve mysteries and have adventures during their summer holidays. We will examine the role and characterization of the main characters and the secondary characters, specifically how gender is portrayed. It will show potential impact it may have on young readers. This analysis will provide a deeper understanding of the representation of gender in a popular and influential children's series.

The third chapter of this project presents the results of a survey that was conducted to determine the extent to which the representation of gender in children's books, particularly in the *Famous Five* series, has affected readers of all age groups, and its potential impact on young readers specifically.

## Chapter 1

### Deconstructing Gender in Literature: An Overview

Gender theories in literature have been a topic of interest for many scholars and critics in recent years. These theories examine the ways in which gender roles and identities are constructed and represented in literature, and how these representations shape our understanding of gender and its relationship to power and society. One of the most prominent figures in the field of gender theory in literature is Judith Butler.

Judith Butler is a feminist philosopher and gender theorist who is best known for her theory of gender performativity. “Gender is not something one is, it is something one does, an act, a doing, a performance” (Butler 25). In simple terms, she argues that gender is not simply a characteristic of an individual but is instead a performance or set of actions that a person does to conform to societal expectations of their assigned sex. In other words, we learn and perform gender roles, rather than simply being born with a certain gender. This means that gender is not fixed or inherent but is instead something that can be changed or challenged. She also critiques the idea of a binary understanding of gender that is male and female and argues that there is a wide range of gender identities and expressions.

In her book *Gender Trouble*, she says that sex is not a natural, biological fact, but rather a social construct that is used to classify and regulate individuals. She argues that the binary understanding of sex as either male or female is not based on any inherent biological differences, but rather on cultural and social norms. She argues that these norms create and reinforce

gender identities and are used to regulate and control individuals, reinforcing power imbalances and the system of gender hierarchy. She uses examples from biology, medicine, legal discourse, feminist and queer theory to demonstrate this.

She discusses how scientists have attempted to define sex based on physical characteristics such as chromosomes, hormones, and genitalia, but have failed to find a clear, consistent definition. She argues that this failure to define sex in biological terms demonstrates that it is not a natural, fixed category, but rather a product of cultural and social norms.

Another example she uses is from medicine, where she discusses how doctors and scientists have used the binary understanding of sex to classify and diagnose individuals, often pathologizing those who do not fit into the traditional categories of male and female. She argues that this medicalization of sex reinforces the idea that there are only two natural sexes, and that deviating from those categories is abnormal.

She also examines the ways in which laws and legal systems have used the binary understanding of sex to regulate and control individuals. She argues that these laws and systems reinforce the idea that there are only two sexes and that individuals must conform to one of these sexes to be recognized and treated as legal subjects.

This theory is important because it highlights the ways in which society shapes our understanding of gender and reinforces traditional gender roles. It also emphasizes the importance of understanding and respecting individual's self-expression of their gender.

She also explores the idea that gender is not an expression of an underlying sex in her book *Gender Trouble*. It is rather a performance that is repeated and reinforced through social norms and cultural practices. She argues that gender is not a stable identity that we are born with, but rather a set of behaviours and traits that are performed and reinforced over time. She also examines the ways in which power operates through gender performativity, and how the concept can be used to understand and challenge the system of gender hierarchy.

She discusses how the characters in Shakespeare's plays perform gender in ways that challenge the traditional binary understanding of gender. The characters in his plays perform gender in ways that blur the boundaries between male and female, and that this challenges the idea that there are only two natural genders. She uses the example of characters such as Viola in *Twelfth Night* who cross-dresses and performs a gender that is different from her assigned sex, to illustrate how gender is a performance that can be subverted or resisted. The gender identity of the character of Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet* is not fixed, but rather a performance that is shaped by social norms and cultural practices. Juliet's gender identity is revealed through her actions and speech, where she is expected to conform to the norms of femininity, such as being obedient, submissive, and emotional.

Another example she uses is the myth of Dora, a case study of a woman diagnosed with "hysteria" in the late nineteenth century. She uses the case to show how gender is a social construct and how it shapes our understanding of identity and power. Dora's case illustrates how the medical profession used the norms of femininity to pathologize women who did not

conform to traditional gender roles. Dora's "hysteria" was a symptom of the societal and cultural pressure placed on her to conform to traditional gender roles and how this reinforced the power imbalances between men and women.

She also uses examples from popular culture, such as drag performances to show how gender is a social construct and how it can be subverted and challenged through performance. She argues that drag performances challenge the idea that there are only two natural genders, and that gender is a fixed identity. *Female Trouble* is the title of a John Waters film, which explores the concept of gender as a performance. The film features Divine, a drag performer, whose portrayal of women suggests that gender is a kind of persistent impersonation that is mistaken for the real thing. Divine's performance destabilizes the distinctions between the natural and the artificial, depth and surface, and inner and outer, which are often used to discuss gender. In a similar way, the book by Judith Butler explores the idea that gender is not a fixed or natural category but rather a set of social norms and expectations that are constantly being performed and reinforced through actions and language. This theory challenges the idea that there are only two distinct and opposite genders and that these are biologically determined. Instead, it posits that gender is a social construct that is performed through repetitive acts, such as dress, mannerisms, and speech.

In *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* Butler explores how speech acts can be performative and how they can be used to reinforce or challenge power structures. She argues that speech acts are not just expressions of meaning, but also have the power to produce and shape meaning.

Butler defines performative speech acts as those that bring about a change in the social reality through the very act of speaking. She claims that the utterance of certain words or phrases, such as “I do” in a wedding ceremony, can have a performative effect and bring about a change in the social reality.

Hate speech, for example, is not just an expression of prejudice but a performative act that helps to construct and reinforce the identity of the speaker, and the identity of the group being targeted. Hate speech, according to Butler, has the power to produce and reinforce the marginalization of certain groups.

In *Giving an Account of Oneself*, Butler explores the concept of ethical responsibility in relation to the performative nature of identity. She argues that our understanding of self is shaped by the ways in which we are called upon to give account of ourselves in different contexts, and that this process of giving account is performative in nature.

Butler claims that the act of giving account of oneself, whether it be in a legal, social or personal context, is a performative act that helps to construct and reinforce our sense of self. She also argues that this process of giving account is not a neutral or passive act, but one that is shaped by power relations and dominant discourses.

She argues that giving account of oneself is not just a matter of providing information, but also a matter of how the information is presented and how it is received by others. She claims that the way in which we present ourselves and the way in which we are received by others is shaped by the



dominant norms and expectations of society and it is therefore a performative act.

Judith Butler discusses the concept of citationality in her book *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. In this book, she expands on her earlier work in *Gender Trouble* and explores how the materiality of bodies is shaped by discursive practices, which are social and cultural norms that define what a body is and can be. She argues that these discursive practices are not just reflective of social reality but also help to constitute it.

She uses the concept of citationality to describe how these discursive practices shape the materiality of bodies, and how bodies come to matter through these practices. Citationality refers to the way in which social norms and cultural practices are repeated and reinforced through citation, or the act of repeating or referencing a particular norm or practice. She argues that this process of citation is necessary for the materialization of bodies and the constitution of gender identities. It is both a constraining and enabling force, as it provides the means for the repetition and reinforcement of dominant norms, but also provides the potential for subversion and resistance. She argues that the repetition of norms through citationality can be used to reinforce or challenge power structures, depending on the context and the way the citation is done.

In the same book, she explores the concept of abjection and its relation to the materiality of bodies and the regulation of sexuality. Abjection refers to the process by which certain bodies and desires are rejected and cast out from dominant cultural norms and practices. Butler argues that abjection is a

powerful tool for the regulation of sexuality and the policing of boundaries between “normal” and “abnormal” bodies and desires.

She claims that abjection operates on the level of the body, and it is through the materiality of the body that certain bodies and desires are deemed abject or unliveable. Abjected bodies are considered as those that threaten the boundaries of the symbolic order and the social norms that define what is considered acceptable. For example, the bodies of people with certain disabilities, those who identify as LGBTQIA+ and those who do not conform to the dominant beauty standards are often considered as abjected. Abjection serves to maintain the boundaries of the symbolic order and reinforce the social norms that define what is considered acceptable and desirable.

Butler’s ideas on gender performativity and citationality have been particularly influential in the field of children’s literature. Children’s literature is often seen as a reflection of dominant cultural norms and values, and as such, it plays a significant role in shaping children’s understanding of gender and their place in society. By examining the ways in which gender is represented and performed in children’s literature, scholars can gain a better understanding of the ways in which these representations shape children’s understanding of gender and their place in society. The theories also help to analyse how these representations shape children’s understanding of gender roles, expectations and stereotypes. Additionally, Butler’s theory has been used to examine the ways in which children’s literature reinforces or challenges dominant power structures and social hierarchies.

## Chapter 2

### Analysis of the series *Famous Five*

The *Famous Five* series is a collection of children's adventure novels written by Enid Blyton. The series follows the adventures of five children - Julian, Dick, Anne, Georgina (George), and their dog Timmy - as they spend their summer holidays together. The group frequently stumble upon mysteries and crimes, which they work together to solve using their unique skills and abilities. The books are set in the fictional seaside village of Kirrin and its surrounding countryside. The series was first published in 1942 and there are a total of twenty-one books in the series. They are widely considered as a classic in children's literature. The series was written in a different time and context, where traditional gender roles and stereotypes were more prevalent. This can be seen in the way the characters are portrayed.

“George was not very pleased at being called a little girl. For one thing she hated to be spoken of as little, and for another thing she always tries to be a boy” (FGAA 23).

It is understood from the very start that George has the wrong notion of being a boy or a girl. She wanted to be a boy just because she thought girls were silly and weak. She has misconstrued the idea of being a boy and a girl. She does not like dresses and dolls just because boys do not have them. She refuses to answer to her real name and always wore a vest, knickers, jeans, and jersey, and kept her hair short as she did want to look like a girl. For her boys were brave and powerful, not girls. She tells Anne that she does not like to do

girly things and likes doing boy things. From the conversation between them it is understood that the boy things are none other than sports that are considered manly by the society like climbing, swimming, sailing, etc. “I cried for days - and I never cry, you know, because boys don’t and I like to be like a boy” (FTI 21-22). George refusal to cry in front of others is a recurring motif across the books, she does not want anyone to think of her as a girl. After George cried for her mother’s sudden departure to the hospital in *Five Run Away Together*, she felt ashamed. It seems that George has imbibed the stereotypical notions of Gender. She does want to fight these gender constructs but is not doing it the right way. “George thus imitates traditional masculinity as an attempt to receive equal treatments” (Balaji). Her idea of boys not crying will affect young boys reading the book. They will naturally start assuming that crying is a sign of weakness. This is not healthy. When Anne reveals that Dick was a cry-baby, He becomes embarrassed and is not ready to admit it.

George prefers to be called by the honorific, Master. ““Why, if it isn’t Master George!’ said the old fellow with a grin. George grinned too. She loved being called Master instead of Miss” (FGAA 27). It seems that for her Master is more powerful as it is used for boys and boys according to her are stronger and more efficient. This can easily influence young readers to think and act similarly.

“Then George clambered up the side of the wreck like a monkey. She was wonderful at climbing. Julien and Dick followed her, but Anne had to be helped up” (FTI 65). There is always a source of astonishment when George does things that are not usual for girls. “She was very good indeed at things like that - better than a boy in some things, Anne thought admirably” (FRAT

131). Anne admired how George could get the rope around the post in the first try and that too better than a boy. This comment shows the mindset of Anne. She believes that these types of activities are done by boys. The admiration that Anne has for George is recurrent in all the books. She thinks that her cousin is extraordinary which can be interpreted as not being an ordinary girl. She is different. On the other hand, George constantly belittles Anne for acting like a girl and also makes it clear to Anne saying the same thing.

The boys are rarely questioned when they do something dangerous but when George does the same thing she is always scolded or admired. This shows the gender bias in the books. “This is rather a dangerous adventure, and Mr Barling is a bad and dangerous man. You and Marybelle are certainly not to come” (*Five Go to Smuggler’s Top* 201). Julian decides to go with Dick alone to Mr Barling’s house. George begs to go with them but is forbidden by Julian to come with them – the reason being that it is too dangerous for the girls.

Anne on the other hand is seen as a proper girl who is timid with all the correct feminine characters. When she read about her mother getting sick in the book *Five Go Adventuring Again*, she immediately started crying. She is the weakest character in all the books, who always needs someone to care for her. She is seen crying throughout the books whenever they are in a tight spot. It seems to be her first reaction unlike the others. She is constantly seen as this damsel in distress figure who seems to never make decisions for herself. Majority of the female characters in the book are just like her. Mrs Lenoir and Marybelle are examples of such characters in *Five Go to Smuggler’s Top*.

Anne only liked things that were deemed appropriate by the society for girls like dolls, and frocks. When George asks Anne if she hated being a girl, she replied that she loves being one as she liked pretty dresses and soft toys. It is as if girls could only like soft toys and wear dresses, and not like cars, helicopters, trousers, shirts, etc. She is like a character who was made to show how proper girls should be like. George is shown as somebody who is sometimes considered an outcast or someone extraordinary in the sense that she is different due to her boyish characteristics.

Stereotypically it is believed that girls talk a lot more than boys and so they are not to be trusted with secrets. This stereotype is one of Ann's main personality traits. She always seems to be the one to blurt out the secrets in her conversations with the grownups.

“We'll leave Anne to play “house” by herself,’ said George, who was longing to stretch her legs” (FRAT 149). Anne wanted to arrange everything beautifully in the cave on Kirrin Island. She was the tidiest of the four and loved to play housekeeping games. When the book portrays that a gentle girl like Anne likes to play housekeeping games like this, it shows how the author who is a part of the society is keen on brainwashing them to make them understand their place. It will make the young readers believe that a girl can only be happy if they keep their homes neat and tidy for their family. Julian and Dick during this time take on jobs outside the cave that need more physical strength or intellect like carrying the heather or keeping a watch on the cliff. Here George is a breath of fresh air. She does not want to be cooked up in the cave cleaning while the boys do the apparently “manly” work outside. But in some of the books, this internalised social norm does make

George feel guilty for not helping Anne while this guilt is not found in the boys.

“My word, Anne - the cave does look fine! Everything in order and looking so tidy. You are a good little girl” (FRAT 153). After Anne finished arranging everything in the cave, Julian praises her saying that she is a good little girl. This further supports the idea of how in patriarchal society women are only praised for housekeeping. Anne was happy about the praise except the part of being called little. She did not find anything else problematic. This shows how deep the idea of being a housekeeper has been embedded into Anne’s mind. It also “emphasises Julian’s superiority because he is the eldest but is also patronising and highlights Anne’s inferiority because she is the youngest” (Coetzee). In the next chapter of the same book, Julien praises her more for even thinking about the little thing like storing firewood in the cave. The statement of praise is “isn’t she a good housewife” (FRAT 158). Anne is pleased with this statement considering her own mother and Aunty Fanny, two prominent women in her life are both housewives and she most probably strives to be like them. She confirms to the role she has seen most of the women in her life has. When a young reader goes through the line, they might conclude that girls are supposed to be only good housekeepers. Most of the references Anne makes in the books were based on daily household chores. “Julian remembered what Anne often said- she said that the world in the early morning always looked as if it had come back fresh from the laundry- so clean and new and fresh” (FRAT 80). It is always Anne in all the books who oversees all the cooking when they go adventuring. Rarely is Julian and Dick

helping with it and if they ever offer in any of the books, Anne always dismisses saying it is her and George's job.

It is always Julian and Dick who make the decisions regarding whom to trust and tell things. They are the ones who take the lead. George does not want to show the piece of linen to the tutor in the book *Adventuring Again* but Julian's decision is the final say and so it is shown to the tutor. Rarely when George gets to be the leader, it is seen as not natural for a girl and adjectives describing her bravery are always added to the text. In *Adventuring Again*, she is called marvellous and someone who is not afraid of anything just because she stayed back alone to fight the two men with Timmy. If it were the two boys, it would not be considered extraordinary. Whenever George stood her ground on her decisions she is termed as not sensible and a stubborn little girl. It was as if it was wrong to be a girl who sticks to her decisions. In *Adventuring Again*, Mr Roland, the tutor found George intolerable unlike Anne as she was difficult and sulky. He did not respect her wish to be called George and not Georgina and annoyed her by calling her by the name she hates. Her own father also gets quite annoyed when George does not comply with his decisions and makes her own ones.

When in a conflict, the boys always pick to fight either using intellect or physically, but Anne tries to stay away from all conflicts. She does not like to be a part of it. In case she is the middle of one, she either starts crying or her brothers or her George must stand up for her. In *Adventuring Again*, When Anne is scared, Julien remarks that the boys and Timmy will protect Anne. He forgot about George because she was a girl. Here George had to assert herself to show that she too can protect Anne.



The boys and girls are constantly separated from each other in terms of space. There is gender segregation. They are given different rooms and the rooms are called Boys bedroom and girls bedroom throughout the books. In case they are staying elsewhere like the island again there is an invisible separation of space. ““The two girls can sleep together on this pile of rugs,’ said Julien. ‘And the two boys will have this pile’” (FTI 93). Hence Gender is a construct, it is created. It is taught and decided by others.

They are also treated very differently. In *Smuggler’s Top*, George is locked up in the bedroom for snooping around in Mr Lenoir’s office. Sooty says that “He wouldn’t have punished you like this if he had thought you were a girl. But he keeps thinking you’re a boy” (160). Mr Lenoir would not have given such an extreme punishment if he just knew that George was a girl. This shows the difference between the treatment of girls and boys.

During the time of Christmas in the books, the subtle lines indicating gender construct becomes even more clear. The two boys were given presents like a railway station, a book on aeroplanes, a pocketknife while the girls got a doll and a book about dogs. The contrast in the technicality of the toys and books shows how gender is created and not something one is born with.

The fifth member of the Five is the male dog Timmy who is a mongrel. The most outrageous discovery is that most of George’s courage during her adventures alone comes from this male dog. He is loyal, loving and extremely violent and powerful against anyone who tries to attack George. He is constantly protecting her. Here too the idea of a damsel in distress is brought it. Hence instead of a man protecting a woman there is a male dog. A study conducted by McGrabe, Fairchild, Grauerholz, Pescosolido, and Tope in

2011, showed that “male animals are central characters in more than 23 percent of books per year, while female animals are in only 7.5 percent” (qtd. in David Mermelstein).

Aunt Fanny is always addressed in the books as Aunt Fanny or George’s mother. Quentin on the other hand is introduced as George’s father, Uncle Quentin, and a Scientist. With just one word a scientist it is understood that he is the only one among the two, who has an identity outside the home. She is always seen as a person who is understanding and kind while Quentin was fierce with no patience. Aunt Fanny seems to do all the work around the house while her husband just sits in his office all day. She cooks, picks up the children from the train station, and prepares the picnic basket. She is seen as the figure who binds the family together with her sweet caring nature. She is not attributed in any other way. “The two girls jumped out eagerly, and looked to see if anyone had met them. Yes - there was George’s mother!” (FGAA 3). Aunt Fanny seems to be the most or the only one involved in George’s life and it constantly seems like her life revolves around the family. She does not seem to have a life of her own and is always catering to her husbands or George’s or the cousin’s needs. “George! We are to come to you again - but oh blow, blow, blow! - we’ve got to have a tutor for the hols, partly to look after us so that your mother doesn’t have too much to bother with us...” (FGAA 2). It seems as if it is only Aunt Fanny’s responsibility to look after the children. Uncle Quentin does not take part in it even though Julian, Dick and Anne’s father is his own brother. He had no time for the kids.

In chapter 2 in *Run Away Together*, George says she puts up with the Stick family because of her mother. Her mother is not well and if the Stick

family leaves then Aunt Fanny will have to do all the work at home. There is no question of Uncle Quentin helping with household work. It is naturally assumed that only Aunt Fanny can do all the work.

Uncle Quentin is a patriarchal man. He seems to be the head of the family and decides who comes and goes in the Kirrin household. His word is the final decision, and nobody was to question it. Whenever George challenges his notions, she is called a difficult child. He notices his wife only in her absence when she is sick. “He doesn’t seem to notice her much when she’s well and cheerful, but he gets awfully upset if anything goes wrong with her” (FRAT 7). It seems as if he sees her as someone who sees to it that his life flows perfectly. So, her absence brings chaos into his life. There seems to be no conjugal feelings of love towards her unless she is sick.

Adjectives play a huge role in the description of the boys and girls in the books. While Anne embodies the role of the stereotypical perfect girl, George is associated with words like fierce, determined, stubborn etc. These words are used for boys generally. Just because she embodies these characteristics she is termed as a difficult girl to deal with. “The boy was really worried about the determined little girl” (FRAT 93). Uncle Quentin is addressed as a very clever scientist. Words like clever are never used to describe Aunt Fanny.

Gender Assumptions about gender are seen constantly throughout the books. In *Run Away Together*, Anne assumes that the dolls and the bear that they got from the trunk was that of a little girl. Objects are gendered in the books. Again, in the book the little kid who was kidnapped assumes that George is a boy just because of her name, jeans, and short hair. Mr Lenoir

from *Smuggler's Top* makes the same assumption. People are also gendered according to what they wear. "I say - look at the fairy doll on the top! Who's that for? A good girl?" (FGAA 64). The fairy doll on the top of the Christmas tree was naturally assumed to be given to a good girl by Uncle Quentin. Apparently, boys cannot have dolls.

The *Famous Five* series reinforces traditional gender roles, with male characters being portrayed as strong, intelligent and capable leaders, while female characters are portrayed as domestic and nurturing, and less physically and intellectually capable. This portrayal can be considered problematic from a modern perspective. It reinforces traditional gender roles and stereotypes that can be limiting for children and can affect their self-perception, aspirations, and career choices. While it is important to consider the context in which the series was written, it is also important to recognize that children's literature should strive to represent a diverse range of characters and perspectives.

## Chapter 3

### Exploring Gender Constructs in Children's Books with a Focus on *Famous*

#### *Five*: Survey Results and Analysis

A questionnaire survey was conducted, consisting of twenty-three questions. Out of these, three questions were related to personal information, while the remaining questions were categorized into simple questions on gender as well as some situational questions, and *Famous Five*-related questions. The first half of the questionnaire was applicable to respondents who have and have not read the *Famous Five* series, while the second half was exclusively for those who have read it. The purpose of the survey is to investigate the impact of the portrayal of gender in the series on different age groups, and to determine if poor gender representation in children's books can influence children. It also aims to understand if such representation can have long-term effects on children's attitudes and beliefs about gender roles and stereotypes, potentially impacting their future lives and relationships. The survey will be an attempt to study the correlation between children's literature and the development of their cognitive and socio-emotional abilities.

The survey included fifty-one participants, with thirty-seven of them belonging to Generation Z (born between 1997-2012), nine being Millennials (born between 1981-96) and the remaining five from Generation X (born between 1965-80). The survey included forty-one female participants, nine male participants and one participant who opted not to reveal their gender. In addition to the gender breakdown of the participants, the survey also considered the participants' location, with forty coming from urban areas and

eleven coming from rural areas.

Twenty-three out of fifty-one participants had read the Famous Five when they were younger. At the beginning of the survey, the first half of the questions consisted of general inquiries. Participants were asked whether they believe gender to be a binary construct, and whether it is socially constructed. The results showed that 76.5 percent of the respondents did not believe gender to be binary, while the remaining 23.5 percent held the opposite view. Additionally, 52.9 percent of the participants believed that gender is socially constructed.

The subsequent five questions in the first half of the survey were situational-based, primarily focused on everyday gender inequalities. The first question in this section presented a scenario in which a parent's relatives visit their home for a gathering. During the event, the relatives notice the parent's daughter dressed in what they perceive as "boy's clothing" and behaving like a boy. The relatives start teasing the girl and making derogatory comments about how she is not acting like a "proper girl". Participants were asked to respond with how they would handle this situation. The majority of respondents stated that they would stand up for the girl and speak to the relatives about the negative effects of gender stereotyping. They suggested that one should be allowed to dress and behave as they feel comfortable without being judged or criticised based on societal expectations of gender norms. One participant said that "if my relatives continue to make negative comments or refuse to respect my daughter's choices, I would politely ask them to leave the gathering. Ultimately, my priority is to create a safe and supportive environment for my daughter where she can express herself freely

and without judgement.” This approach shows a clear and strong commitment to safeguarding their daughter’s emotional well-being and creating a safe space where she can be herself without facing criticism or discrimination.

Another participant shared their plan to educate their relatives on the idea that gender expression should not be restricted by traditional societal norms. They would politely explain to their relatives that their daughter wearing “boys’ clothes” or doing “boys’ activities” does not mean she is not a proper girl. They would emphasize that their daughter has the freedom to express herself in ways that feel authentic and fulfilling to her, without being confined to a specific gender role. This approach demonstrates a willingness to engage in constructive dialogue and to educate their relatives on the importance of embracing diversity and accepting individual differences. The next question is a sub-question of the previous one, which asked why some young girls pretend to be boys. One participant shared their personal experience as a tomboy and their affinity towards men’s clothing. They find that wearing such clothes provides a sense of freedom, allowing them to climb trees and sit with their legs spread without facing judgement. This is one of the reasons why they believe individuals may pretend to be boys. This perspective highlights the idea that gender expression and clothing choices are not limited to gender norms and can vary based on individual preferences and comfort levels.

Another participant identified two possible reasons for young girls pretending to be boys. Firstly, it may be due to gender identity issues. In this case, the individual may feel more comfortable expressing themselves as a boy to align their outward appearance with their internal gender identity. Secondly, the individual may feel that adopting a boyish persona allows them to enjoy

privileges and benefits that only men are typically granted, such as greater freedom and independence. This view suggests that societal expectations and gender roles play a role in how individuals express themselves and may contribute to the desire to adopt a male persona.

The next situation-based question is about how to address a child's inquiry about why certain toys or activities are only meant for boys or girls as a parent. One participant said that "if my child asked why certain toys or activities are only for boys or girls, I would explain to them that there are no such things as 'boys' toys' or 'girls' toys' or 'boys' activities' or 'girls' activities'. I would tell them that they should be free to play with whatever toys or participate in whatever activities they enjoy, regardless of their gender." Another participant said she will explain to the child "the society's concept of gender and how it is flawed and that playing with any toy does not mean much." This approach can help promote inclusivity and encourage children to break away from societal stereotypes and embrace their individuality.

For the third question, the participants were asked what they would do if they were camping with their cousins and observed that the boys were preventing the girls from participating in outdoor activities such as fishing and exploring, while requiring them to perform domestic tasks such as cooking and other household chores. One participant suggested that as an adult, they would intervene by making anyone involved in the exclusion come back and perform their own chores. They would ensure that everyone contributes to the task, and chores are distributed fairly. They would also emphasise that cooking or any other domestic work is not a punishment and that anyone who



enjoys it can participate, regardless of their gender. If the participant was a child, then they would refuse to stay back and encourage the other girls to join them on an adventure. This approach promotes inclusion and encourages everyone to participate in activities and explore the outdoors without any gender-based restrictions. Another participant said that “I will tell the boys that what they are doing is not fair. It can be understood that the boys might have learned to act like that from their surroundings so I will take my time to make them understand that all these ideas are in fact stereotypes.” This approach helps the boys understand the negative impact of their behaviour and promotes gender equality. Another unique approach suggested by a participant is to ask the boys to perform “girls’ chores” for a day and witness how hard it is and how capable the girls are.

The next question asked how the participant would react if they saw their significant other repeatedly scolding your son for crying when he is upset and telling him that boys don’t cry. One participant said that they would tell their significant other that boys have every right to feel upset and let out those emotions and that crying is not a sign of femininity neither must it be considered so. Another participant shared their willingness to actively intervene if they heard their partner saying negative things about men crying. They also mentioned that they would try to understand more about their partner’s upbringing and emotional experiences in order to support them better. They further elaborated on their intention to help their partner recognize that crying and being vulnerable are acceptable and normal aspects of emotional expression. The majority of participants agreed that crying is a

natural and vital way for both our bodies and minds to cope with pain, and it is not exclusive to a specific gender or sex.

The last situation-based question described a scenario where the participant and their partner return home after a difficult day, and the partner becomes upset with the participant for not having prepared the meal. The partner then demands that the participant take on all household and childcare responsibilities, effectively becoming a stay-at-home parent. Participants were asked how they would handle this situation, and around twelve of them stated that they would first have a conversation with their partner to address the issue. If the discussion did not result in a resolution, they might consider the possibility of separation or divorce. One participant said that they would explain to their significant other that household chores should be shared equally since both partners are working. They believe that it is not reasonable for one person to bear the entire burden of household duties. Another participant stated that they would express to their significant other that they have the right to pursue a career that they love and earn their own income. They believe that being a parent does not mean that they, as the female partner, should be the only one making sacrifices.

When participants were asked if they could recall the age at which they first experienced gender-based discrimination, most of them stated that they could not remember as it began at a young age. However, a few respondents noted that they first encountered such discrimination when they were around six or seven years old.

According to the majority of the survey participants, they adopted strict gender roles and stereotypes during their childhood, mainly influenced by their surroundings, which included their family, friends, religion, education which comprises teachers, classmates and textbooks and various forms of media such as television shows and books. They also reported that the children's books they read during their childhood had the most limited gender roles and stereotypes, citing examples like fairy tales such as *Cinderella* and *Snow White*, as well as popular book series like the *Hardy Boys*, *Nancy Drew*, *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, *Berenstain Bears*, *Secret Seven*, *Amelia Bedelia*, and *Curious George* and even the popular comic series *Archies Comics*. Additionally, they mentioned traditional Indian story books like *Amar Chitra Katha* and *Panchatantra* tales, as well as short stories from the *Mahabharata*.

When asked if the children's books they mentioned earlier had any impact on their perception of gender, one participant responded by citing the *Berenstain Bears* book series, which made them believe that it was acceptable for mothers to only focus on their children and not have a life of their own. However, over time they realised that this perception was incorrect. Another participant who had read the *Hardy Boys* book series shared that it had a significant impact on their perception of gender. According to this participant, the male characters in the series were consistently depicted as courageous, daring, and adept at solving intricate problems. They often found themselves in perilous situations and were portrayed as skilled in physical pursuits such as fighting and detective work. Conversely, the female characters in the series were often portrayed as helpless and requiring rescue. They were generally

shown to be less involved in the action, with more passive roles that were limited to providing emotional support to the male characters.

The next question posed to the participants was whether they believed that children's books have a significant role in instilling gender roles in young minds. One participant expressed that books have a significant impact on perpetuating gender stereotypes as children tend to accept the narrative without questioning it. Another participant answered that "children's books do play a huge role in instilling gender roles. Girls get the idea that "good girls" should be docile, kind, submissive, tolerant and beautiful and boys think that their entire existence revolves around chivalry and wealth." Moreover, another participant noted that our childhood experiences, including the books we read, can shape our attitudes and behaviours towards ourselves and others, as stories and characters can leave a lasting impression on our understanding of gender roles and stereotypes.

The latter half of the questionnaire which is specifically intended for respondents who have read the *Famous Five* series starts with the question pertaining to the age at which the participants first started reading the series. Approximately 37.6 percent of the twenty-four participants who have read the *Famous Five* series reported reading it when they were nine to ten years old.

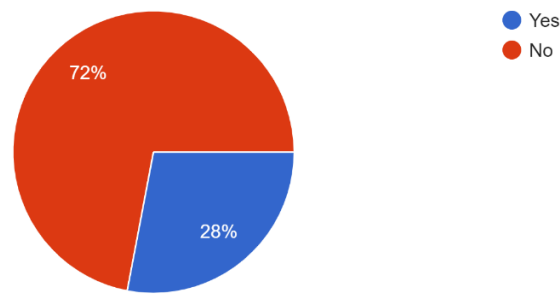


Fig. 1. Did you take note of all the gender stereotypes and the confined gender roles that the books had when you read it for the first time?

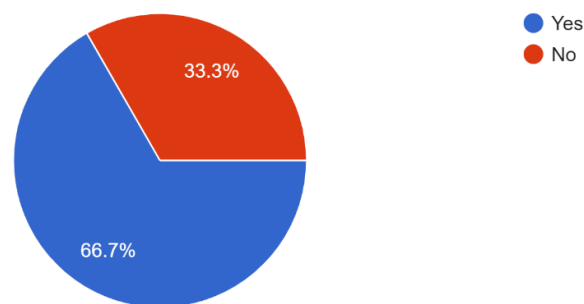


Fig. 2. Do you notice the gender stereotypes and the confined gender roles when you think about it now?

Fig. 1 shows that seventy-two percent of the participants did not take note of all the gender stereotypes and the confined gender roles that the books had when they read it for the first time but fig. 2 shows that 66.7 percent of them notice it now.

When asked about how each reader felt about how gender is portrayed in the series, one reader mentioned that when they read the books as a child, they may not have fully grasped the gravity of how gender was portrayed. Nevertheless, they distinctly recall feeling perplexed by certain conversations in the books, prompting them to wonder why the characters were speaking that way about gender. Another participant shared that although they have not read

the series in a while, they did enjoy it while growing up. However, upon reflection, they found it difficult to ignore the overt stereotypes and gender roles that were prevalent in the characters. The series presented a narrow and constricting representation of gender. They added that they would not want their children to read such books as they hold the potential to strongly reinforce such stereotypes. One reader expressed that they used to be fond of both Anne and George as characters, despite their stark differences. However, they have felt that Enid Blyton at times tried to mock George for her tomboyish tendencies. Another participant said that “it [the series] does partake in a lot of gender stereotyping. It is possible that the gender stereotyping in the *Famous Five* series is a result of the time period in which it was written, it remains a concern that these stereotypes are present in a children’s book that continues to be widely enjoyed. The fact that the series is still popular highlights the need for ongoing discussions around gender representation and stereotypes in literature.” The next question asked the participants some of their memories of instances where gender was portrayed inaccurately. One participant shared how Julian and Dick always referred to Anne as an excellent housekeeper, perpetuating gender stereotypes. Another participant pointed out that the male characters often took the lead in solving mysteries and are depicted as physically strong and capable through activities like hiking, climbing, and swimming, reinforcing traditional ideas of masculinity. Additionally, another participant also pointed out that the female characters were often portrayed as more nurturing and caring than their male counterparts, with Anne being responsible for cooking and taking care of the group’s needs. A participant also recalled how George was told by Julian and

Dick that she couldn't join them on their investigations, and how Anne was often given less exciting tasks to do. In addition, another participant recalled how George did not cry because she believed that boys don't cry and therefore, she shouldn't.

The last question asked the participants to share their favourite character from the series and explain why, as well as reflect on whether they find the character problematic in retrospect. One participant's favourite character was Dick, but upon reflection, they realised that he seemed to dislike being perceived as weak and believed that proper boys shouldn't display any emotions considered stereotypically feminine or girly. One of the other participants mentioned that their favourite character is Anne, but it caused them distress in their younger years. They felt inferior because they were labelled as stereotypically "girly" which made them anxious about expressing certain interests due to the fear of being mocked, similar to how Anne was ridiculed. This also led to a feeling of sadness, as they felt that if they didn't conform to the tomboyish stereotypes, they would always be considered inferior to boys. This created a sense that boys would always be viewed as superior, regardless of one's abilities or skills. Another participant related to the character George as they saw similarities between themselves and George. However, upon reflection, they realised that they both engaged in behaviours to appear more masculine in order to gain more opportunities. The actions George takes to present as more masculine are the typical behaviours associated with male gender stereotypes.

The survey suggests that the representation of gender in the series as well as other children's books have influenced the participants beliefs and attitudes towards gender roles and stereotypes at an early age.



## Conclusion

Judith Butler's theories of performativity, citationality, and abjection provide insight into the construction of gender in society, particularly as portrayed in the popular children's series *Famous Five*. The imposition of binary gender constructs with strict codes of behaviour, as seen in the series, presents the danger of influencing young readers. The third chapter substantiates the above statement. The findings from the study that included fifty-one participants, indicate that rigid gender roles depicted in children's books can have a lasting impact on young readers. This becomes even more clearer when considering the different age groups among the participants. Furthermore, the second half of the questionnaire, which focused on *Famous Five*, substantiates this claim as participants recalled instances where gender stereotypes were inaccurately portrayed in the series, which affected their childhood. The majority of participants felt that while the series was written during a time when gender stereotypes were widely accepted, they do not believe that it should be read by children today. They believe that these stereotypical representations can have a lasting impact on young minds and make them believe that these are the ideal forms of gender behaviour.

The main male characters, Julian and Dick, are portrayed as strong, resourceful, and intelligent leaders, while the main female characters, Anne and Georgina, are portrayed as more domestic, nurturing, and less physically and intellectually capable. This can be seen as problematic from a modern perspective because it reinforces traditional gender roles and stereotypes. These stereotypes can be limiting for children reading the books, as they may

internalize the message that boys should be leaders and girls should be caretakers, which can affect their self-perception, aspirations, and career choices. This can also result in gender-based prejudice and discrimination among children both at school and in the home. Additionally, the portrayal of female characters as less capable than male characters can contribute to the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions and can also perpetuate the idea that women are less valuable and less worthy of respect. The limited representation of gender in children's literature can also contribute to a lack of diversity and inclusivity in wider society, making it difficult for individuals who do not conform to traditional gender norms to find representation and acceptance.

It is worth noting that the series was written in a different time and context, where traditional gender roles and stereotypes were more prevalent, and it is important to consider this while evaluating the gender construction in the series. However, it is also important to recognize that these stereotypes are not always accurate or beneficial, and that children's literature should strive to represent a diverse range of characters and perspectives as this can have a lasting impact on the reader's childhood as well as adulthood.

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## Appendix

### Questionnaire

#### Section 1: Participants who have and have not read *Famous Five* series

1. Age
2. Gender
3. What type of locality do you live in?
4. Do you believe that gender is binary?
5. Do you think gender is a construct?
6. You are a parent and your relatives have come over for a get-together. They notice that your daughter is dressed in what they perceive as "boy's clothing" and is acting like a boy. They start teasing her and making comments about how she is not acting like a "proper" girl. How would you handle this situation?
7. Why do you think some young girls pretend to be boys?
8. You are a parent and your child asks why certain toys or activities are only for boys or girls. In this scenario, what do you think the best approach would be?
9. You are camping with your cousins, and you notice that the boys are excluding the girls from activities like fishing and exploring, and instead, are making the girls stay back to cook and do other domestic tasks. How would you handle this situation?
10. You are a parent and you see your significant other repeatedly scolding your son for crying when he is upset and telling him that boys don't cry. What would you do in this situation?

11. It's been a tough day for you and your significant other. Both of you reach home late and he gets angry at you for not getting the food ready. He accepts you to take on all of the household chores and childcare responsibilities and be a stay-at-home parent. How would you react in this situation?
12. Do you remember the first time you experienced gender-based discrimination as a child? At what age was it?
13. What were the sources of influence for you to adopt gender stereotypes as a child?
14. In which children's book did you find the most confined gender roles and gender stereotypes?
15. Do you think that the book you have mentioned above has affected how you perceive gender as a child?
16. Do you think children's books can play a huge role in instilling gender roles in young mind? Please provide an explanation to support your answer.
17. Have you read the *Famous Five* books?

## Section 2: Participants who have read *Famous Five* series

18. At what age did you start reading the *Famous Five* series?
19. Did you take note of all the gender stereotypes and the confined gender roles that the books had when you read it for the first time?
20. Do you notice the gender stereotypes and the confined gender roles when you think about it now?
21. What is your opinion about how gender is portrayed in the series?

22. What are some of your memories on gender-based stereotypes in the *Famous Five* series.
23. Which character was your favourite in the series and why? Do you feel like the character is problematic when you think about it now?