

“BABEȘ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY” - CLUJ-NAPOCA

FACULTY OF SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL WORK

**GENDER STEREOTYPES IN
ROMANIAN PRE-SCHOOL AND PRIMARY EDUCATION
AFTER TWO DECADES OF DEMOCRACY
PHD THESIS SUMMARY**

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Table of Contents

PART I

1. Motivation for choosing the theme and the scientific relevance of the paper	6
2. Objectives, questions and research hypotheses	9
3. Research methodology	12
4. Social stereotypes. Conceptual delimitations	15
4.1. Social stereotypes from historical perspective	19
4.2. Cognitive, motivational and social perspectives on the stereotyping process	24
4.2.1. Cognitive processes involved in the formation of stereotypes	25
4.2.1.1. Categories and social categorisation	25
4.2.1.2. Cognitive errors	29
4.2.2. Motivational perspectives on the formation of stereotypes	32
4.2.3. Social perspectives on the formation of stereotypes	36
4.3. Onset, use and change of stereotypes	39
4.4. Types of social stereotypes	44
4.4.1. Racial stereotypes	45
4.4.2. Ethnic stereotypes	48
4.4.3. Religious stereotypes	50
4.4.4. Age-related stereotypes	53
4.4.5. Stereotypes of people with disabilities	56
4.5. Role of stereotypes in social life	57
5. Gender in social context	60
5.1. Gender from social perspective. Conceptual delimitations	60
5.2. Gender differences at: biological, psychological and socio-cultural level	66
5.3. Epistemological and theoretical approaches of the gender	71

5.3.1. Gender displays – Goffman	73
5.3.2. Gender construction – West and Zimmerman	74
5.3.3. Theory of social roles of gender differences - Eagly	77
5.3.4. Gender relations from Bourdieu’s perspective	80
5.3.5. Feminist ideology.....	83
5.4. Evolution of gender relations from a socio-historical perspective	86
5.5. Gender socialisation.....	93
5.6. Gender identity formation.....	97
5.7. Gender stereotypes.....	101
5.8. Agents of gender socialisation - gender stereotypes providers.....	107
5.8.1. Gender language	107
5.8.2. Kindergarten and school	110
5.8.2.1. Toys and games.....	111
5.8.2.2. Gender attitudes and expectations in interaction from the educational environment	116
6. Children's literature and gender stereotypes	121
7. Gender stereotypes and social lives of children.....	129
 PART II	
Results	
8. Frequency of presentation of characters by gender	134
8.1. Share of male-female characters in the titles of school textbooks	135
8.2. Share of male-female characters in school textbooks	141
8.3. Share of male-female characters classified by main-secondary character principle	147
8.4. Location of character presentation.....	154
9. Adult activities - Stereotyped / non-stereotyped crafts	158
9.1. Sexual division of labor and gender identification	158

9.2. Gender stereotypes and the image of the family - gender roles asymmetry	169
9.2.1. Parental roles.....	172
9.2.2. Work and housework	181
9.2.3. Recreational and leisure activities.....	186
9.3. Occupations / trades.....	190
10. Children’s activities – sharing gender behaviours	206
10.1. Childhood and gender socialisation	206
10.1.1. Leisure-time activities/play – boys / girls	216
10.1.2. Emotional activities: boys / girls.....	220
10.1.3. School activities - boys / girls.....	226
10.1.4. Intellectual activities - boys / girls	228
10.1.5. Domestic activities / work - boys / girls	231
11. Gender identification: behaviors - attitudes - traits of boys and girls.....	235
11.1. Attributes, traits of boys-girls	236
12. Gender stereotypes in pre-school education	246
12.1. Stereotyped patterns of femininity and masculinity	248
12.1.1. Childhood - experiences, activities, characteristics and personality traits.....	248
12.1.2. Physical female beauty - Male power - valued standards.....	253
13. Conclusions	257
Bibliography.....	262

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Everyday reality and the intrinsic nature of individuals as social beings favour the onset of complex mechanisms that make us both the witnesses and entrepreneurs of stereotyped beliefs with impact on social interactions.

The topic addressed in this approach is: "Gender Stereotypes in the Romanian Pre-school and Primary Education after Two Decades of Democracy". The interest in this topic arises from my experience as teacher, the opportunity to observe children's behaviour in the environment in which they spend a lot of their time, i.e. kindergartens and schools. Following repeated observations, I have noticed some "regularities" found within these institutions that materialize in the form of stereotyped activities, behaviours or attitudes imposed by the gender category. At first glance, manifestations like: "girls play with dolls, boys play with cars", "girls are allowed to cry and boys are not allowed to cry", "girls are more obedient and boys are more playful" can be found frequently in everyday life, manifestations which are actually perceived as natural, normal, universal.

In the collective mind, the behavioural gender differences are part of the natural order of things, are incorporated into the life of a person as social individual who relates with the other individuals. The interest in the topic chosen arises from the curiosity to understand the social mechanisms (often subtle) used to build the gender, the legitimization of certain behaviours / gender manifestations, which are the scientific explanations underlying the social meanings of gender, especially the manner in which gender perspectives approaches are presented to children. The curiosities for this field of study range from questions about how gender stereotypes occurred, who manifests them, how are they formed, or why gender differences in behavioural manifestations of the people have imposed.

Sociologists and psychologists show that gender is imposed as a social conditioning through learning the role of gender (following the association of biological sex), becoming a recurring activity such as a daily practiced algorithm, which helps us to understand and to order

the individual social existence as men or women. (Eagly, 1987 West, Zimmermann 1987 Bourdieu, 2003). People practice gender, they build it in their daily activities. Ideological messages of the gender are embedded in the personal culture, and women and men use them as standard models based on which they can make judgments about themselves and others, they direct their behaviours and act according thereof. Gender ideology is internalised as a system of signs similar to a code of conduct. (Taylor, 2003)

From an early age, children are gender roles "actors", they learn gender differentiated behaviours and act according to gender standards, stereotypes imposed culturally. Hence, I deemed it was important and equally interesting to study the ways in which gender socialisation is achieved in the context of school and kindergarten. The main agents of socialisation in the formal institutions such as kindergarten / school are represented by teachers and teaching materials used - toys, tokens, drawings, models, books – in pre-school education, and especially school textbooks - in primary education.

Children are presented the typical female and male posturing / behaviours through mandatory or optional activities in kindergartens, or through classes at school. Following several observations (from pre-school children activities), I have noticed that in optional activities where children have the opportunity to choose their favourite game or activity, they are directed by the teacher towards gender category specific activities. There is a tendency of children to turn towards greater range of activities and toys, but are they redirected by educators under the pretext that: "*You are a girl / boy and you are not allowed to play with such toys*". Thus, children learn, through a series of verbal sanctions, which toys are *suitable / typical* for the gender category. As they grow older, the teacher's guidelines are no longer needed as children have mastered the regulatory issues relating to gender, heading straight for the games to which they have access, showing a tendency of rejection toward toys which are not allowed.

Following the integration of children in primary education, activities are replaced by classes (lessons) and the main teaching materials used are school textbooks. While learning to read, children are exposed to cultural gender standards contained in texts (textbooks, books) that allow them to discover culture as part of the socialisation process, as important mechanism through which cultural knowledge is passed from one generation to another.

The questions that arise and from where this study began are the following: "Do the literary texts presented to pre-school and school children include a series of stereotypes based on gender?", "Are there changes in the manner of presentation of textbooks / texts after the introduction of education reform in 2000, compared to the period before 1990?" I reckon that the scientific analysis of the manner in which school textbooks (literary texts) propagate the structures of gender ideologies into two distinct periods: the socialist-communist period, and the democratic-capitalist period (periods separated by ideology and by the social - objective reality proposed) represents a fertile ground for the sociological research.

My overall objective was *to observe whether the Romanian Language and Literature textbooks (1st – 4th grades) respectively the stories from the pre-school curriculum present a series of gender stereotypes*. I have focused on the Romanian Language and Literature textbooks for 1st – 4th grades and the stories recommended in pre-school education because I felt that they provide, in addition to the knowledge strictly related to literature and language, a range of information about individuals in terms of rules implied by gender identification (social practices prescribing gender behaviours, gender relations, division of labour, gender hierarchies). Children identify most often with the characters presented, trying to reproduce their behaviours and even wishing to acquire a status similar to that of the characters exposed through texts or images¹. Literary texts are means to help develop their own identity.

The research hypothesis arising from this overall objective, to be tested, is: *Most of the texts from the Romanian Language and Literature textbooks for primary education, stories from pre-school education respectively, present a number of gender stereotypes*.

I wanted to identify the degree to which gender stereotypes appear in school textbooks (stories) depending on several categories established. In this respect, I have built a series of theoretical categories, by breaking down the concept of gender stereotype. Therefore, I have reported to some specific variables: activities, crafts, games, toys, traits, characteristics of personality that capture different aspects of the concept of gender stereotype, but also to observe the share of characters by gender (in this case sexism represents an imprint of stereotyping) and

¹ See Narahara May M. (1998).

the hierarchies given by main character-secondary character typologies or location of the character presentation.

Performing a comparative analysis of two distinct periods in the recent history of Romania represented a specific objective. Thus, I focused on the period before 1990, when the society was characterised by another ideology, and the configuration and layout of textbooks was different. There was only a standardized version of the textbook for each grade, promoted by a single publishing house (Didactică și Pedagogică Publishing House). Previous mentalities emphasized gender equality by including individuals of both sexes on the labour market, while the current mentality emphasizes the liberal spirit, democracy and personal efforts, promoting meritocracy. Subsequently, Education Reform facilitated the introduction of alternative textbooks, more and more publishers being able to propose a series of textbooks. Therefore, the comparison of texts from textbooks before 1990 with the current/alternative textbooks to observe how gender stereotypes are presented in the two periods represented another specific objective proposed.

The research method chosen and, in fact, the mostly used method in this type of research is the content analysis with different variations². As such, I have considered that the most appropriate method to obtain the data aimed is the content analysis, namely a descriptive, longitudinal analysis.

Thus, I have chosen to analyze the content of Romanian Language and Literature textbooks of 1st – 4th grades from two distinct periods 1989 - 2004/2005, which helped me to get in possession of data able to capture and portray the changes occurred on the perspective of addressing gender stereotypes. Sampling of the textbooks reviewed was conducted considering that until 1990 the textbooks submitted to pupils were single / standardized. I have chosen the current period of alternative textbooks to distinguish whether the educational reform aimed at addressing gender perspectives. The sample reviewed comprises: 8 textbooks, 4 textbooks for the period before 1990 (Didactică și Pedagogică Publishing House) and 4 textbooks for the current period of alternative textbooks (Aramis Publishing House).

² For example, some of the latest research in this area: M Hamilton, D. Anderson, M. Broaddus, K. Young (2006), C. Brugeilles, I. Cromer, S. Cromer, Z. Andreyev (2002) Gooden and Gooden (2001), Diekman A., S. Murnen (2004) used this method. Whether we are talking about the content analysis based on modular questionnaire, standardized questionnaire or standardized grid, they all generally aimed at obtaining the same type of information.

For the analysis of textbooks, I have developed a standardized scale for texts analysis, taking into account the category variables aimed at collecting specific data on the objectives proposed. The sample of texts aimed all the texts presented as compulsory lessons, therefore a full sample. The data obtained were processed using statistical procedures such as frequency distributions, or calculating tests of statistical significance, such as the chi-squared test (χ^2). Using the data obtained, I have established certain hierarchies of gender stereotypes that appear in the texts of textbooks, and, at the same time, I answered the research questions proposed, tested the research hypotheses formulated, and noticed the extent of differences in the content of textbooks from the previous period and the current period. I have developed a hierarchy of information per years to observe when certain changes occur or if there are constant elements and their nature.

The results obtained were aimed at both a quantitative (frequency distributions, tests of statistical significance) and a qualitative approach, the text analysis to identify certain standards, types of gender. This analysis was also applied to stories recommended to children from pre-school education ³.

The thesis was structured in two parts. The first part presents the aspects referring to the motivation for choosing the topic, objectives, research questions and research methodology, subsequently followed by the theoretical and epistemological approach on concepts used throughout the research. The second part presents the results achieved and conclusions from the research and at the same time the results of similar studies conducted in other countries.

The theoretical approach included an overview of social stereotypes from the conceptual clarification, the evolution of scientific knowledge involved, the nature of stereotypes in terms of psycho-sociological issues, the process evolution of stereotyping, the typology of stereotypes and last but not least, their role in social life.

³ I would like to mention that the curriculum recommended for pre-school education for Romanian Language and Communication is grouped on two levels. Thus, for the lower and middle group (called Level I) the following stories are recommended for reading: "Sanda la grădiniță", "Cîrpele cel lăcom", "Little Red Riding Hood", "Puf-A lb și Puf-Gri", "Capra cu trei iezi", "Turtița", "Punguța cu doi bani". For the upper group or pre-school group (Level II) the readings recommended are: "Cuvântul fermecat", "Iedul cu trei capre", "Nuieleșă de alun", "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs", "Inima mamei", "Fata babei și fata moșneagului", "Puss in Boots", "Cinderella", "Sarea în bucate" and "Swans".

Further on, another chapter presents the concept of gender from the social perspective with related concepts such as: sex, gender, male (masculinity), female (femininity). The epistemological and theoretical approaches of gender are reserved another section. The concern for gender study is present in the focal interest of sociologists such as: Goffman - explained the gender displays, West and Zimmerman - argued in favour of building, acquiring and practicing gender, Eagly - grounded the theory of social roles of gender differences, and Bourdieu - analyzed gender inequality in terms of dominant-dominated; and issues involved in feminist ideology to capture the diversity of theoretical approaches offered to the study of gender.

Other sub-chapters presented: the evolution of gender relationships from the socio-historical perspective, the socialisation of gender, the development of gender identity, gender stereotypes, agents of gender socialisation as suppliers of gender stereotypes (the language of gender, kindergarten and school, toys and games, and gender attitudes and expectations from the educational environment interaction).

Given the topic chosen for each research, I have allocated a separate chapter in this paper for information that refer to children's literature and gender stereotypes, and gender stereotypes and social life of children.

The second part of the paper presents the results achieved and conclusions of the research conducted which I will briefly present in the following pages.

Frequency of character presentation by gender. Data obtained after identifying the characters by gender criterion certify that 982 characters appear in the 335 texts analyzed, of which **688 (70%)** are male characters and **294 (30%)** are female characters, indicating a male-female ratio of **2.34:1**. After applying the chi-squared test χ^2 to compare the distribution of frequencies of the two male / female samples, I obtained the value: $\chi^2 = 158.08$ (N = 982, 1, p = 0.001) which confirms that there is a statistically significant difference in the distribution of characters by gender.

The classification of characters by gender in the two periods studied, 1989-2004/2005 shows the same proportioning, i.e. the male-female order is kept in both periods:

- 1989 – 405, (68%) male characters, 191, (32%) female characters;

- 2004 – 283, (73%) male characters, 103, (27%) female characters.

The alternative school textbooks have fewer texts and the number of characters is lower. But while in the school textbooks published in 1989 the male-female ratio is 2.12:1 (405-191), in the alternative textbooks the male-female ratio indicates a greater difference, i.e. 2.75:1 - (283 -103).

After calculating the value of χ^2 to compare the distribution of the frequencies of the two male-female samples in terms of characters share (adults and children), the following values were obtained in the two periods studied: $\chi^2 = 49.78$, (N = 350, 1, p = 0.001), adults - 1989; $\chi^2 = 27.33$, (N = 246, 1, p = 0.001), children - 1989; $\chi^2 = 52.12$, (N = 245, 1, p = 0.001), adults - 2004; $\chi^2 = 31.84$, (N = 141, 1, p = 0.001), children - 2004/2005. The data obtained confirm that there is a statistically significant difference in the distribution of characters by gender in both periods in both age groups.

Of the total 982 characters differentiated by gender, 531 - (54%) are main characters and 451 - (46%) are secondary characters. Of the 531 main characters, 362 are male main characters (171 adults, 191 children) and 169 are female main characters (79 adults, 90 children). $\chi^2 = 70.15$ (N = 531, 1, p = 0.001) - the difference in the presentation of the male main characters against female main characters is statistically significant. Of the 451 secondary characters, 326 are male secondary characters (249 adults, 77 children) and 125 are female secondary characters (96 adults, 29 children). $\chi^2 = 89.58$ (N = 451, 1, p = 0.001) - there is a statistically significant difference in presenting secondary characters by gender.

Location of character presentation. Starting from the definition of gender stereotypes as overgeneralised beliefs about the manifestations, behaviours, attitudes of men and women, gender studies have extended over manifestation areas/locations of men and women to acknowledge whether non-stereotypical/stereotypical aspects are identified starting from public-men private-women combinations. As highlighted by Bourdieu (2003), the male and female areas are well defined. There is a division of things and activities based on the male-female opposition found in examples such as: up/down, forward/backward, left/right, clear/obscure, public (out)/in (private). Similar in difference, these oppositions are consistent enough to support each other through connotations and correspondences. (Bourdieu, 2003).

In this study I intend to analyze how the characters are divided by gender and age in three different locations delineated as relatively distinct areas: public space, private space, and nature. The public space is dominated by male population in 110 cases, compared to 41 cases of female population. After calculating the chi-squared test χ^2 for the distribution of characters differentiated by gender based on the location of presentation (public space), the following value was obtained: $\chi^2 = 31.52$ (1, N = 151), $p < 0.001$. The value obtained confirms that the difference between the male characters against female characters is statistically significant in terms of presentation in the public space.

The next location - as numerical weight - is the private space (house, backyard) (141 cases), in which both categories of gender are frequently presented, noticing a slightly higher rate for female characters (78 cases) against the male characters (63 cases), but without a statistically significant difference ($\chi^2 = 1.6$, 1, N = 141, $p > 0.001$).

And finally, the last location - nature (garden, in the woods, on the slope, when hunting, on the field) is an area where the male characters are found more frequently than the female characters, 40 cases compared to 7 cases, indicating a male-female ratio of 5.7:1. These values are distributed in two age groups: adults, children – one may notice that weights are balanced (male: men - 19, boys - 21, female: women – 3, girls - 4).

Adult activities. While gender refers to the construction of social roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a given society deems appropriate for men and women, then gender stereotypes are overgeneralised beliefs about these manifestations. Eagly (1987) shows that gender roles are strongly interconnected with gender stereotypes, that are overgeneralised beliefs about the individual condition as male or female.

The variable analyzed called "adult activities" aims those concerns when adults are presented to operate in the context of different situations such as: work at job, care and education of children, activities involving work outside the job (household chores, work on the field, etc.), activities involving various concerns for the country's defence and good organization, recreational activities, and finally, other types of activities.

438 adult activities have been identified: 273 male activities and 165 female activities, which indicate a male-female ratio of 1.65:1 (χ^2 value is 26.64 (1, N = 438), $p < 0,001$ confirming that

the difference between male and female characters in terms of involvement in certain activities is statistically significant).

The most common activities of adults are those which involve the care and education of children, followed by the activity of work conducted outside the job, the work at job, activities that involve the country's defence and good organization, and less frequent, recreational activities and the activities classified in the category other types of activities.

The hierarchy of activity fields of adults by gender is different. Men activate more in areas such as country defence, work (other labour, work at job) and education of children, while the main activity among women (the most frequent category of activity) is education and care of children, followed by the category of other labour and work at job. The recreational activities are mentioned more frequently in men, while in women are almost non-existent, this situation can be found also in the case of category called other types of activities.

The data obtained confirm the sexual division of labour that has been perpetuated over time in different historical periods. The traditional role of men to provide the stability both at a micro-social (family protection, ensuring welfare through the provision of goods) and a macro-social level, the protection of the community or the country assigns them occupations such as decision-making to mitigate hazards or other times of crisis mentioned here under the name of activities of defence, organization and ruling of the country.

The most frequent activity of female characters is the education and care of children, followed by the category of other types of labour and work at job.

Gender differences in social behaviour are seen as products of the labour division between the sexes, reproduced by social-structural practices regulated by the disparate status of gender (social role theory - Eagly, 1987). The societies categorise gender differences as crucial and relevant, individuals are born into already structured societies and identify themselves with the membership group, acquiring the gender norms through the process of socialisation (social learning theory - Bandura, 1977).

The distribution of adult activities by gender in the two periods studied (1989-2005) indicates the existence of several activities mentioned during the period of single textbooks

against the alternative textbooks, both for men and for women. Men activities are more common than women activities, except the activities of care and education of children, which are more common in women and the category of other labour during 1989. There is a significant reduction of work at job both in men (41-15) and women (24-5) in 2005 compared to 1989.

Gender roles are also largely divided within the family. Child education and care activities reveal stereotypical aspects in the manner in which men and women relate to children. Men, presented as fathers or grandfathers, are generally involved in the education and care of boys and, less often, of girls. Fathers spend time with the children for recreational or learning activities outside the house, in nature or in public spaces. They are often presented as giving children gifts, supporting talented children, urging them to learn or go to school. Moreover, fathers and grandparents spend their time with their children/grandchildren telling them stories and sometimes they are authoritarian, they reprehend them when they make a mistake or make them more responsible through various challenges (they organize the work schedule, they talk to their children about the labour insights).

Women, presented in the role of mothers (or grandmothers), are concerned with both educating boys and girls. Whether it is stated in general terms that they take care of children, rise them or are concerned with the daily activities of care - feeding, washing, cradling, care in case of illness or warning against potential hazards - women are presented as protective and attentive to details in the child education and care. Regarding the emotional characteristic, they support them when they are upset or suffer and are worried when children are suffering and are in danger or are disobedient. They are attentive, gently expresses sensitivity to the children, gently reprehend them, raise their responsibility, and warn them of possible dangers and sacrifice for children. Women are often presented in the house background – they tell stories to children, care for them or teach them various things.

Parenthood, either father or mother, reported to the status of child, boy or girl requires special social constructions materialized in behavioural or attitudinal manifestations that are perpetuated through social and social learning processes. Therefore, the social normative of expectations of gender roles requires manifestations and attitudes used to socialise children, the future adults who acquire and share the concept of oneself as assimilated to the gender scheme, revealing stereotypical aspects found in parenthood. Gender roles within the family are generally

asymmetric and stereotyped. Fathers are often authoritarian, insensitive, responsible, and dominant especially in educating boys. The mother's role gives woman attitudes of protection, gentleness, bias, care, tenderness, mediating between the child and the father.

Another field of activity where gender stereotypes and gender roles asymmetry can be easily observed is the labour activities (not involving the work at job) that involve various household chores, work of the field, artistic activities, etc.

Men have been portrayed as involved in the work of the field or work in the garden, in the position of stereotypical works: they plough, weed out, mow grass, gather nuts, grow wheat, bind sheaves, build haystacks. They also go to the mill to grind, work in the forest, cut wood, weave twigs, dig wells, carve wood or build churches. They also take care of animals or take them to pasture, or feed them or it is generally specified that they deal with livestock. On a stereotype basis, men are passionate about engineering (they build aircraft and airship, are concerned about cybernetics, build computers), aviation (fly airplanes), work in artistic fields (play the violin, compose music, carve wood or stone, write books) or medicine (discover remedies against germs).

As with men, women activities involving work are classified as stereotypical activities. These activities are mentioned in textbooks under the formal name of housework or other nominated activities that fall into the same category of activities such as: they prepare/cook food, wash clothes, bake cakes, ventilate the room, clean, spin, and sew. In addition to the household chores or activities involving work within the house/family, women are presented as participating in the work of the land – harvesting, they go shopping or to the mill, they take care of the animals or cure human diseases with herbal potions.

The field of recreational activities represent a limited field of activity in adult concerns. Men are portrayed as being very opened towards activities such as: fishing, hunting, reading, painting, travelling, various discussion or contemplation of nature; while for women the leisure is almost an inexistent activity.

Following the data obtained from a similar study, Brugeilles (et. al. 2002) concluded that, in general, the image of the family is conventional and limited, so that the complexity of family relationships is negated. Books are settings for the family representation, revealing, under some

oversimplified form, that gender relationships built within the family contribute in a subtle manner to ensuring, transmission and reproduction of differentiated and hierarchical sexual gender roles. Male and female roles are presented precisely defined and firmly established in the progress from childhood to adulthood. Learning social roles through identification with an adult of the same sex appears to be very important. Gender typologies insured to children are thus preserved.

Occupations / trades. The results obtained from the analysis of textbooks in terms of hierarchy of trades held by the characters differentiated by gender reveal an uneven distribution of the gender, both in terms of numerical share of trades and their diversity under the labels of gender stereotypes. Of the total **267** trades presented in school textbooks, male characters occupy **233 (87.27%)** trades, and female characters occupy **34 (12.73%)** trades. Thus, of the total adult male characters, 55.48% are presented as having certain occupations / trades, while of the total female characters, 19.43% are mentioned with occupations / trades. The male-female trades / occupations ratio is **6.85:1** (233-34).

The most common male occupations / professions, 99 i.e. 42.49% are classified as occupations / trades for leading and defending the country. The field of leading and defending the country under the typological diversity of trades is stereotypically a male occupational sector. A second category of male occupations is comprised within the educational field (24 cases - 10.3%), found in the context of the life experiences of children/pupils, i.e. formal educational - school environment. The activity field involving formalized education of children - in this study - is specific to both male and female population, even if, according to stereotype, it is a female field of activity.

Other occupational male categories that are found frequently in school textbooks are those of: farmers, pilots, factory workers, doctors, craftsmen, mechanics, shepherd, landowners, hunters, musicians (fiddlers), composers, merchants, priests, sailors, miners, printers, engineers, poets (storytellers), mayors, scholars, violinists, pianists, conductors, metropolitans. Male trades that are mentioned at least once in the school textbooks are diversified. Whether we speak about occupations / trades that are no longer so frequently nowadays or have even disappeared (such as: outlaw, weaver, farrier, sparrowhawk, halwai, hermit) or newest emerging trades / occupations (consul, movie operator, cyberneticist), or trades from various fields of activity

frequently encountered in everyday life and found mainly in the scope of the male characters (driver, crane operator, vendor, postal worker, mason, director, officer, musician, forester, painter, doorman, pilot, builder, fisherman, sculptor).

Therefore, according to stereotype, the range of male trades/occupations is diverse and complex. One may find occupations/trades involving leadership positions, jobs in various artistic fields, intellectual professions, or other fields in which men are specialised in stereotypical manner.

The analysis of textbooks in terms of occupations/trades of female characters shows both a low frequency and a limited range of fields of activity. The existence of gender stereotypes at occupational level may be analysed from a dual perspective, on the one hand at the general level of male-female hierarchical recurrence there is a low percentage, restricted fields of activity and positions at the basic level of the occupational hierarchy, and on the other hand the gender stereotypes analysed from the socio-historical point of view of the occupational sectors characteristic for the two periods studied, communism - democracy.

Of the 175 adult female characters, 34 (19.42%) are presented as having a trade. The main trade assigned to female characters is the teacher - 19 cases (55.88%), followed by the occupations generally specified as a factory worker - 5 cases (14.7%), and other trades specific to the same field, such as: spinner (1 case), weaver (1 case). Another field of activity is the trade: saleswoman (2 cases) and cashier (1 case). There are also three intellectual crafts such as: doctor, healthcare worker or chemist (1 case / trade), and finally, two other occupations: farmer (1 case) and maid (1 case).

The distribution of trades in two periods studied (1989-2004/2005) shows a series of differences. Of the total adult male characters presented in the school textbooks from 1989 - 241, 155 (64.51%) are presented as having trades, while of the 179 adult male characters from the school textbooks from 2004-2005 - 78 (43.58%) are presented in the context of crafts. In the case of adult female characters, of the 109 adult female characters presented in the school textbooks from 1989 - 28 (25.69%) have trades, and in 2004-2005 of the 66 adult female characters 6 (9.09%) are presented in the context of trades. A downward trend is observed both in men and women in the context of presentation of the characters in relation to trades.

Of the total male trades, 233 - 155 (66.52%) are presented in the textbooks of 1989 compared to 78 (33.48%) presented in the school textbooks from the period 2004-2005, and of the 34 female trades, 28 (82.35%) are presented in the period 1989 and 6 (17.65%) are presented in 2004, thus observing a decline in the occupational activation of male and female characters during the period of alternative textbooks. The differences observed between the two periods studied certify that in the school textbooks from 1989, the craft of factory worker, spinner, weaver was found in 7 cases, while in the alternative school textbooks from 2004 this craft disappeared. The same situation is found in the case of male trades, the trades of factory worker (6 cases) or machinist (4 cases) have disappeared from the alternative school textbooks.

Children's activities. The children's activities variable aimed the analysis of concerns, occupations, manifestations, crafts and things undertaken by children (boys, girls) as they are presented from the perspective of the social context where they operate. The subtlety of gender differences imposed by social levers favours the implementation of differentiated and differentiating habits of boys and girls, with differentiated expectations and reporting. Gender is a recurrently methodical routine, acquired during childhood through socialisation (West, Zimmerman, 1987). There are social patterns that determine the appropriate behaviour manners laid down by the category of gender - how to talk, how to dress, how and what to play, to act or to manifest.

After analysing the texts of schoolbooks, I have identified 376 activities undertaken by children. These activities were grouped into six categories⁴: leisure activities/play, emotional activities, school activities, intellectual/knowledge activities, domestic/work activities, other activities. The 376 children's activities are distributed by gender as such: 261 (69.4%) boys activities and 115 (30.6%) girls activities. ($\chi^2 = 56.7$, (1, N = 376), $p = 0.001$ - there is a statistically significant difference in the distribution of children's activities by gender).

From the distribution of children's activities one may observe that the same downward order is observed both for boys and girls in the ranking of the most frequent activities, including: leisure activities/play, emotional activities and school activities. Table 1 shows that the percentage

⁴ The categories of activities were identified taking account of similar studies conducted by other researchers (Pešikan, Marinković, 2006, Diktaş, 2011, Brugeilles, Cromer, Cromer, Andreyev, 2002) but at the same time according to the information found in the school textbooks analyzed

distribution of children's activities by gender is balanced and approximately the same weight percentages are ascertained.

Table 1. Percentage distribution of children's activities by gender in the school textbooks

	Leisure activities / play	Emotional activities	School activities	Knowledge intellectual activities	Household work activities	Other activities	Total
Boys	<i>34%</i>	<i>24%</i>	<i>13%</i>	<i>13%</i>	<i>9%</i>	<i>7%</i>	<i>100%</i>
Girls	<i>32%</i>	<i>24%</i>	<i>14%</i>	<i>8%</i>	<i>11%</i>	<i>11%</i>	<i>100%</i>

By customising the analysis of the distribution of children's activities during the two periods studied, it is ascertained, similarly to the analysis of general data, that leisure activities/play, emotional activities and school activities are the most common both for boys and girls.

According to stereotype, leisure and play activities of boys are more diversified. Boys are more frequently depicted in the context of the nature, strolling, wandering the hills, meadows and forests, feeding animals, admiring the birds and nature, enjoying winter, sledding, bobbing, or carolling. Boys are the main protagonists of pranks and adventures, fantasies of childhood: go bathing, stealing cherries, stealing the hoopoe from the linden, telling tricks, climbing trees, dreaming dwarf or travel with rockets, looking strawberries in the woods, knocking down the cabinet, falling off the chair, attacking the bee hive, dreaming and imagining stories, tricking their friends to do the work for them, spilling the bowl of soup or distressing the creatures in the yard.

Games played by boys are varied: playing ball, with kites, the train, with Father Bear, with Rilă the Rabbit, with the whoosh, playing the fight, building rockets, moulding plasticine, playing with animals, with the drum, sword, trumpet, playing with the mechanical train or playing football.

For boys, spending the free time - whether it's walking, fun activities or recreational activities - reveals a variety of activities. They go into the harbour or to the round dance, listen to stories, talk about animals, watch TV shows for children, are on holidays or play the violin, listen to stories or spend time with the family (parents, grandparents, siblings).

The main leisure activity of girls is playing with the doll (food preparation, dressing the teddy bear, making clothes for dolls, building the house for dolls), followed by other types of games: play the train, play with the ball, but also activities such as watching TV shows for children, strolls, admiring the nature, birds, dreaming dwarfs, listening to music, playing with animals, or listening to stories. The category of childhood roguery, fantasies and adventures occupies a narrower range with only a few such activities: they overturn the closet, sneak out to go to their grandparents. A subset of leisure activities frequently found in the presentation of girls is the interactions and a discussion with others, or family chats (with the brother, telling the mother a story, spending time with the grandparents). There are mentioned several cases of non-stereotypical leisure activities when girls play soccer and the girls team wins at the expense of the boys team (alternative textbooks), or boys playing with stuffed toys.

The repertoire of emotional states is largely the same for both boys and girls. An exception is the emotional states such as: teasing, ridicule, dissatisfaction, gruffness that appear only in emotional manifestations of boys. Another consideration is that while generally boys are more frequently depicted to exhibit emotional feelings (joy, anger, shame), there are situations of emotional manifestations where girls are more frequently portrayed. Therefore, girls show emotions of amazement, wonder and fascination more frequently than boys, they are also more fearful or timid than boys.

The data obtained show that children's emotional expressions are diversified and specific to childhood manifestations of both gender categories. At the same time, there are some gendered, stereotyped manifestations that place boys to experiment emotional manifestations that emphasize their masculinity and situations in which girls express their femininity.

At the level of school activities, one may notice stereotyped peculiarities and manifestations which categorize and report children towards traditional gender predisposition such as boys' activism and girls' obedience.

The data obtained certify that boys are more often interested in activities that involve knowledge. The fields of knowledge where boys activate are various, they either prepare their homework / learn for school or read, are passionate about the mysteries of science, the various natural phenomena, they study the transformations of nature in autumn, the life of birds and animals, the role of air, they study music or manufacture items, toys. Even if intellectual and knowledge activities of girls largely overlap with the intellectual activities of boys, i.e. they prepare their homework or read, the field of knowledge of girls is narrower both in terms of frequency and variety. Girls are depicted rather as curious about the aspects of natural phenomena or functioning of the objects surrounding them. While the boys carve objects or build toys, girls manufacture bookmarks.

Analyzed qualitatively, in terms of identifying the gender stereotypes, children labour can be grouped into three categories: stereotyped work, non-stereotyped work, and work which is neutral in terms of gender. According to stereotype, boys perform a number of jobs such as: they plough by tractor, carry the groceries, go to the mill to grind flour, cut wood, working with the plough, sowing, carry the wood, participate in the ritual of digging a well, carve arrows, manufacture breastplates, paint the fence, grass the sheep. The category of non-stereotypical work of boys includes work such as: weaving cloth, swinging his little brother, drawing water from the well, seeding and caring about the flowers. Labours considered neutral from a gender perspective are those such as: cleaning shoes, taking care of the donkey, shopping, mowing or teaching his sister to mow.

The activities of girls in domestic work are mostly falling in the category of gender stereotypes. Girls take care of the garden, weed the vegetable layers, water the plants, arrange the table for having lunch, clean the house, sew mats, crochet scarves or spin. Among these activities, girls also carry fruit baskets, learn to mow, carry wood (neutral activities) or go to the mill (non-stereotyped activity).

Behaviours - attitudes - traits of boys and girls. Besides trades / occupations, activities, gender stereotypes are identified based on personality traits and physical appearance (Deaux, Lewis, 1984). According to stereotype, masculinity is socially built and is associated with a number of traits such as: dominance, competence, intelligence, rationality, determination, strength, courage, ambition, dedication, competitiveness, insensitivity, attractiveness thanks to accomplishments.

According to stereotype, the femininity is associated with traits such as: obedience, dependency, inability, emotionality, receptivity, intuition, weakness, timidity, passivity, cooperation, sensitivity, physical attractiveness.

The texts analyzed identified 203 characteristics / features of children, of which 126 (62%) traits associated with boys and 77 (38%) features associated with girls, and the boys-girls ratio is 1.64:1. Data obtained were grouped into two categories, on the one hand there are common attributes that occur in both boys and girls and attributes that are mentioned only for boys or only for girls. Analyzing the features / attributes common to both genders, I have quantified 117 cases (72 boys traits - 45 girls traits). The main common feature of children is friendship, followed backwards by curiosity, courage, courtesy, diligence, impoliteness. Therefore, the main features shared by children reveal the educational values which are grown on the age segment of childhood: friendship, desire for knowledge manifested by curiosity, respect and diligence. An educational and moral value that aims to cultivate children's personality is found in traits such as: greed, laziness, disobedience, pity, impatience, dignity, kindness, dignity, beauty, bravery, patriotism.

After centralizing the data obtained, traits that are associated only with boys or only with girls were identified. I have identified an equal number of categories (some common, some differentiated) for each gender, and at the same time there is a category generically called "other features" that includes a number of features that were not classified in any previously identified category. The common categories established are: emotional responsiveness, intelligence / ability, negative traits, dominance / power. The differentiated categories established are work, mischief for boys and weakness, physical traits for girls.

The categories of boys' features with the highest share are those involving intelligence / competences and negative traits. Features such as: talent, mathematician, inventiveness, perfectionism, shrewdness or assuredness, deceit, malice, ridicule, stealing, selfishness, ingratitude fall within those categories. The second place identified in the hierarchy of boys' traits is the work. They are described as diligent, hard-working, assiduous and thorough. The following three categories follow in a downtrend order: dominance / power, roguery and the category of other attributes. Boys show their strength and dominance by physical force (fight), by pride, audacity and judgment, they are mischievous and urchins. The category of other

attributes includes traits such as: quiet, dreamy, passionate, troubled, honest, agile or coy. The latter category - emotional responsiveness - includes features such as solidarity, generosity and understanding.

While in the case of boys the categories were balanced in terms of the share, for girls there are two categories that occupy a high percentage and stand among from the other categories. Consequently, the girls' main features are emotional receptivity and weakness. Girls show their emotional responsiveness through features such as: support, care, gratitude, generosity or compassion. Moreover, girls exhibit weakness highlighted by features such as: irresponsibility, fear, awkwardness, obedience, smudging, silliness or hilarity. The category of other traits includes attributes such as: patience, generosity, person of honour and appreciation. The category of other features includes negative traits such as: jealousy, bad mouth or unfriendly. In a downward trend follow the categories such as intelligence / competence and physical traits. Girls are depicted as clever or resourceful but with features involving the physical appearance: dude up or hair styled.

Gender stereotypes in pre-school education. Children's stories are cultural products that share and provide social values and, at the same time, are important means through which children assimilate culture. Children's texts provide them with opportunities to examine social relationships and systems of beliefs and values, especially the values built within the social background of gender relationships. (Baker-Sperry, Grauerholz, 2003)

Children's stories that were analyzed present a series of benchmarks valued at the social level of femininity and masculinity. Gender issues are approached from a dual perspective. On the one hand, children's life experiences are presented, depicting certain patterns of characteristics, behaviours and personality traits of children (boys and girls), and gender roles that adults perform in the context of these experiences. On the other hand, children's stories transmit a series of implicit messages about femininity and masculinity standards.

The category of readings referring to childhood presents life experiences, activities involving children and their personality traits. In addition to the educational - instructive message of these texts, the gender profile of the children is outlined. Male characters are presented to a higher share, boys as main characters, and girls are presented less frequently. What should be

noted is that while boys are presented more commonly as main characters when referring to life experiences of children, when the storyline of the stories refers to the life experiences of teenagers to the maturity, the main characters are girls.

Like in the case of school textbooks, the typology of boys' personality is varied and diverse in the texts recommended in pre-school education. In general, boys are classified and categorised in the context of social gender stereotypes. They are portrayed as characters with a variety of personality traits: good, bad, naughty, greedy, spoiled, hearted, sloppy, polite, false, grateful. Life experiences in which they are presented / categorised (mainly highlighting the educational and moral aspects) gives them space for expression, experimentation and cultivation of varied traits, attitudes and behaviours. These diverse repositories of experiences are actually the ingredients, social prescriptions, norms that promote the social values and traits of masculinity (such as: independence, strength, courage, aggression, dominance) supporting the dominant gender system.

Girls are presented in the same dominant gender system, socially perpetuated and legitimised. The context of manifestation of girls presents a different symbolic message, the gender values cultivated, perpetuated and legitimised are of different nature, therefore the repository of experiences follows another path. The fact that gender prescriptions that are different for boys and girls can be noticed from the presentation of the characters. Details of the physical appearance are valued in presenting girls, while for boys the physical appearance is not as valued. Little Red Riding Hood is: "a cheerful and lovely girl, loved by everyone who saw her". She was wearing "a little riding hood of red velvet, which suited her so well that she would never wear anything else". Moreover, Sanda is the beautiful little girl dressed in uniform, combed with red bows. The kid in the "The kid with three goats" is presented as "neither big nor small, neither more beautiful nor ugly. As they say: neither too bad nor very-very". The traits of masculinity developed for boys belong to another register. They are taught to be strong, brave and independent. Ciripel is heartened and encouraged to cope with the problems, motivated as it is a brave cock sparrow.

One stereotyped aspect noted in these texts, without exception, is the presence of maternal symbol where the normative prescriptions of the gender role are well defined. The image of the mother assumes characteristics and features such as: protectiveness, gentleness,

care, close watch, exhortation, tolerance, safety, and reproofs and penalties when such situations are imposed. The power of mother's sacrifice for her children is also a stereotypical trait that the role of mother involves. The image of the mother is present in all the childhood experiences.

Therefore, the childhood experiences recounted in stories recommended in pre-school education reveal to a certain extent a stereotyped repertoire of presenting characters differentiated by gender. The dominant gender system includes boys, girls and mothers in categories that promote the encouragement of traditional gender values. Implicit messages convey in a stereotypical manner the idea of developing the skills and characteristics differentiated by gender. Developing femininity involves personality traits such as: obedience, discipline, order, attention to detail, tolerance. Attitudes developed such as: naivety, innocence are related to feminine traits and the physical appearance including attire, hairstyle or various accessories are perpetuated and valued social standards. The development of masculinity involves features such as: strength, bravery, domination, rebelliousness, determination, experimenting limit situations. Attitudes, behaviours and traits encompassed by the role of mother are also well outlined in the texts recommended to pre-school children.

In the category of readings referring to the life experiences from adolescence, the most stories recommended follow a predetermined pattern of presentation, and enhance femininity and masculinity standards. The female characters, in fact the main characters of these stories, are the princesses. They represent the standard model of femininity implying well defined characteristics, traits and values. The main feature is physical beauty, followed by spiritual goodness, diligence, and sensitivity, naivety, innocence, the need for protection. Feminine beauty primarily involves physical beauty which is a valued characteristic, while ugliness is devalued. Princesses are particularly beautiful in all stories, being envied for their beauty, and because of this they face various problems and difficulties.

Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz (2003) showed that feminine beauty is an important means to acquire a valued social status and high levels of self-esteem. The ideal of female beauty portrayed in children's fairy tales represents potential gender messages for children, major sources of assimilation of culture. Girls who read about beautiful princesses who get rich and marry "Prince Charming" tend to share the same values. (Baker-Sperry, Grauerholz, 2003)

The princes are themselves the standard model of masculinity, but they are rather secondary characters in the action of stories, they appear in the latter part of the story. They are strong, valiant, they save princesses and are charmed by their beauty. The hero, often a prince, is generally described as brave and beautiful. His beauty, however, is a secondary characteristic of his actions. While the heroine finds herself in a difficult situation, the male character proves his strength, masculinity by killing the evil older women and saving the princess.

Therefore, just like in the school textbooks, the stories presented to pre-school children display a wide range of gender stereotypes.

Conclusions. Identifying gender stereotypes in Romanian pre-school and primary education – starting from the analysis of the stories recommended in pre-school education and single and alternative school textbooks from two different periods (1989-2004/2005) - represented the overall objective of this study. Data and results achieved certify that behavioural gender differences and gender stereotypes are part of the individual existence, are incorporated into the life of a person as a social individual who relate with the other individuals. Social mechanisms, often subtle, which exert a strong social control, the various socialisation agents providing the levers of gender socialisation, sharing perspectives of gender approaches, legitimate social norms, are presented to children through the teaching materials analysed.

As reported during this study, gender stereotypes are inevitable as long as society categorises individuals in men / boys and women / girls and promotes and legitimises a differentiated culture of activities, roles, crafts, behaviours, attitudes, traits, games, toys and other aspects involved by the social culture of gender.

Most theorists who have studied the social issues of gender claim that the aspects imposed by the gender category should be reconsidered from the perspective of social importance they involve, and believe that the artificial barriers between man and woman should be identified, and circumscribe their dysfunctional role and the mechanisms by which they can be removed⁵. Gender stereotypes are recognised both positive valences (they facilitate the development of cognitive processes, being means of saving energy; the means to explain some information from the social environment through fast, facile categorisation, they are opinion

⁵ See Iluț (2000), Giddens (2000).

shared by the group, being consistent with the prospects and rules accepted by the group, they represent the means, tools for structuring and organization of society and life) and negative valences (they restrict the development of real individual potential of adults - men, women - children - boys, girls by social norms and values of the gender which usually prescribe gender behaviours in a standardised, algorithmic typology manner; and they simultaneously promote standards of masculinity - strength, dominance - and femininity - beauty, obedience – which are sometimes difficult to achieve).

This study aimed to identify the method of presentation of the characters by gender in school textbooks and stories recommended for children and to draw attention to the need for reconsideration of the issues involved in the differentiation of gender, their awareness, the need for implementation of differentiated educational alternatives updated according to specific gender needs based on social reality of the present day; which contribute to improving school performance of both girls and boys according to the specific development needs of the gender, reported to increasing the quality of life, the individual potential and offer the possibility of varied and flexible life and occupation choices.

This is the way to promote an educational approach that focuses on the development of individual potential of girls and boys, unlimited by social norms and values that prescribe gender stereotyped behaviours. Gender differences in some fields should be compensated, observed, perceived and understood in terms of complementarity and not as gap or superiority of one gender over the other, but rather as types of differently social constructed behaviours and manifestations, ensuring cohesion at both macro- and micro-social level. Asymmetry/polarization of gender culture constitute a milestone that guides the interactions between adults and children, and underpins all of the relationships between individuals. Gender norms represent strongly valued, shared, legitimated standards, the gender identity is part of the intrinsic individual nature, and social pressure exerted on children and the motivation to be evaluated positively by others determine a controlled gender behaviour that manipulates their assessment and the assessment of those around them.

The data and results achieved show that school textbooks, as presented in two distinct time periods (1989-2004/2005), offer a relatively limited gender approach, promote on the one hand a wide range of practices and gender stereotypes, and on the other hand sexism by unequal

shares and frequencies, statistically significant of the presentation of characters by gender (in almost all the sectors of analysis).

Thus, all research hypotheses formulated at the beginning of the study were confirmed. Most of the texts from the Romanian Language and Literature school textbooks for primary education, respectively stories from pre-school education present several gender stereotypes. Most activities, crafts, games, toys, feminine-masculine personality traits are depicted in a stereotypical manner.

Traditionally, in patriarchal societies the role of man is that of "head of the family" - to provide goods and services needed to support the family, and the activities and occupational fields in which he is involved converge toward achieving this goal, and in a complementary manner the woman is the one who takes care of the family, being reserved a certain type of specific activities such as housework activities and raising and educating children.

The presentation degree of gender stereotypes is not different between the two periods studied and the categories of stereotypes encountered do not differ, and the research hypothesis according to which there are no significant differences in terms of sex stereotypes share between the two periods studied is confirmed. The aspect that was observed upon presenting the textbooks is that the alternative school textbooks have a narrower range of texts entailing a narrower share of characters, activities, crafts, behaviours, games / toys etc.

The aspect that distinguishes the two periods analysed 1989-2004/2005 is noticeable within the scope of occupations and professions of adults which are more diversified in the single textbooks unlike the alternative textbooks. A downward trend is observed both in men and women in the presentation of the characters under the context of crafts. In the textbooks from 1989 there was the trade of factory worker, spinner, weaver, while in 2004 alternative textbooks this craft is no longer present. The same situation is found in the case of male professions, the trades of factory worker and machinist disappear from the alternative school textbooks.

During the communist period, even if the idea of gender equality was supported, sexual division of labour existed in the public space. Bureaucracy, the repressive apparatus of state security and the heavy industry were predominantly male areas, especially at management level, and women held clerk positions, worked in the light industry (textile industry, the service sector

and activities related to consumption, agriculture or education and health). Gender stereotypes existed at the level of employment by the masculinisation and feminisation of certain industries.

The post-communist period, recognised as a transition period, was characterised by a repositioning and redefinition of male and female identities, both in terms of public and private space. The transition from the communism to the democratic system generated economic, political and social changes, and gender identities were redefined, the interrelationships between genders were renegotiated and were marked by traditional attitudes at the same time. Both men and women have adapted to the new challenges in the occupational system. These involve either jobs with different profile, or the old traditional occupations implemented by the duality and asymmetry of consciousness of the male patriarchal system (head of the family, which is predestined to the public system) and the female existence (defined by its nature to care for and ensure the balance of the private space of the family) were renegotiated.

On the other hand, similar studies in other countries also reveal gender stereotypes, and some books and/or educational materials offers a more varied, nuanced and less rigid range of presentation of gender issues both in terms of stereotype and the non-stereotype, which shows that children's literature in our country has not been updated, adapted to the current reality from the gender approach perspective point of view.

Certainly, a more complex analysis of this field study, of the manner in which children are socialised according to gender would have been appropriate and conducting interviews with teachers (educators, teachers), parents, grandparents and children to notice their standing to the issues involving gender and gender stereotypes. The extending of research on other agents of gender socialization are topics for further deepening.

Strick (2014) says about the books that they should give children the chance to explore things and new ideas, and at present books reinforce the stereotypes about what it means to be a boy or a girl, and thereafter they make the children who do not conform to these stereotypes to be most vulnerable and pose a risk of lower self-esteem. (A. Strick, 2014 cited Lowther, T., 2014)

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