



Including boys in gender studies: the importance of gender-balance in children's stories



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Overview

- Although it is true that women have not yet been treated as equal in many parts of the world, a gender-balanced society will not be achieved without including men.
- However, gender studies have traditionally been dominated by women studies.
- The imbalanced approach of gender study for the purpose of achieving a balanced society is only a paradox.
- This paper evaluates how girls and boys are represented in children's stories by visiting two children's stories from the East and the West. The East is represented by an Indonesian folktale titled "Rara Jonggrang", the West is represented by "Beauty and the Beast".
- The study finds that there are similarities in the stories discussed in terms of how males are portrayed, i.e. what Kupers calls as toxic masculinity.

Stories should entertain and educate

“Dulce et Utile”
Horace (13 BC)

Entertain

&

Educate



Children stories educate and entertain

**“Children’s literature are in fact Utile et Dulce”
Citraningtyas (2013)**



Educate

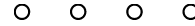
&



Entertain

Because children literature has stronger educating element, it should contain good teachings. Unfortunately, this is not always the case.

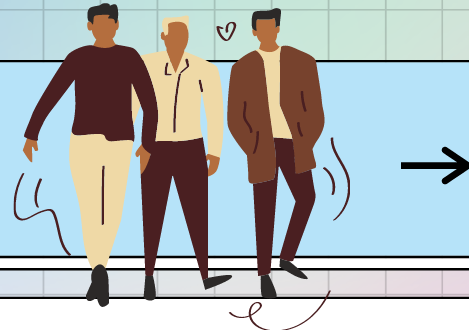
Gender issues



It is true that the portrayal of females in literature has not always been promising. However, the portrayal of males is not always positive either. Yet there are only few studies investigating how males are represented in literature, especially in children literature.

Gender studies have traditionally been dominated by women studies. If no studies are conducted on the inclusion of boys, boys do not have the appropriate male model they can learn from.

| Toxic Masculinity



Toxic masculinity is “the constellation of socially regressive male traits that serve to foster domination, the devaluation of women, homophobia, and wanton violence” (Kupers, 2005)

It is the traits associated with men in which they should suppress their emotions and behave aggressively, showing no weaknesses.

It is very harmful to anybody that do not fit into this very narrow ‘box’. This includes queer boys, gender non-conforming people and women. It also upholds structures of patriarchy that stop women from accessing certain positions of power which fundamentally challenges their basic human rights (Ross-Williams, 2019).

Two stories from the East and the West

1

There are similarities in the stories discussed in terms of how males are portrayed, i.e. what Kupers calls as toxic masculinity (2005).

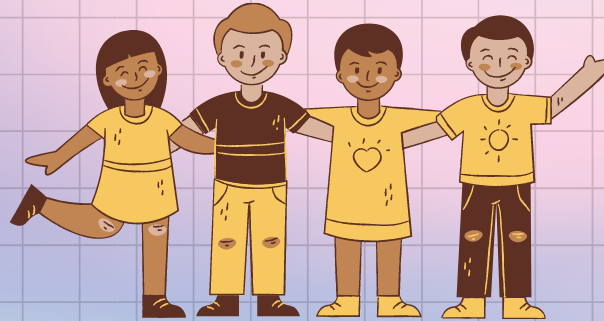
2

Other positive masculine qualities necessary to be modeled for a balanced society are rarely portrayed. This results in the perception that masculine norms are homogeneous and universally toxic.



The East

The East is represented by an Indonesian folktale titled “Rara Jonggrang”



The West

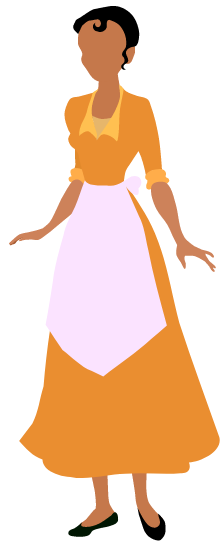
The West is represented by the “Beauty and the Beast”

The East: Rara Jonggrang



- A well-known folktale from Indonesia, often associated with the famous Hindu temple in Central Java, the Prambanan temple. Even the 9th century temple is also often called as Rara Jonggrang temple. It is a temple complex of 240 large and small temples, with the highest temple of 47 metres in height.
- The tale tells about a malicious king of the Pengging Kingdom, Bandung Bondowoso, who wanted to occupy the peaceful Kingdom of Prambanan.
- He had supernatural power (Genies).

1 Rara Jonggrang →



If he wishes to marry her, he has to build one thousand temples in just one night.

2 Straw and Mortar →

"We have to stop the genies from building the temples by burning the straw and making some noise by pounding the mortar. That way, they are going to think that the sun is rising and run away. Genies are afraid of the sunlight," she carefully instructed.



3 The Curse ✓

The Genies ran away with only 1 temple left to be built. Bandung Bondowoso was furious because he knew that Rara Jonggrang tricked him. Because of his wrath, he swore to make Rara Jonggrang a temple.

"I already have 999 temples. Now, I am going to make you the one-thousandth temple."

Toxic masculinity in Rara Jonggrang

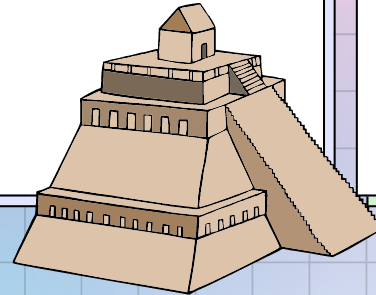
Bandung Bondowoso (the boy) forces Rara Jonggrang (the girl) to marry him.



The boy assumes that he has the right to cheat on the task given, however he was furious when he felt cheated on.

He shows his power and curses Rara Jonggrang to be a stone temple

→ she is motionless and dead → an act fiercer than killing.



Rara Jonggrang becomes a temple that can be widely seen by public forever and ever

→ a constant reminder of the power that a man can do to a woman who refuse to marry him.

Beauty and the Beast

Once upon a time a merchant set off for the market and asked each of his three daughters what present they wanted. The last daughter, Beauty, said to be the prettiest and sweetest of them all, simply wanted a rose.

1 | The Rose →

During a storm the merchant found a castle, bathed in light. The castle pampered him. However, when he remembered his promise to Beauty, he picked a rose from the castle's bushes.



2 | The Beast →



Instantly, a large Beast gleamed angrily at him. He will only forgive the merchant on one condition: to bring Beauty to him.

3 | The Mirror →

Beauty and the Beast became good friends. One day, through a mirror, Beauty saw that her father was close to dying. She begged the Beast to return home. The Beast let her go after asking her to come back in seven day's time.



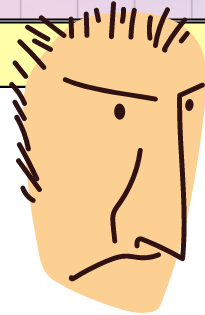
4 | The Curse ✓



Beauty did not realize seven days had gone by. When she returned she saw the Beast crouching in sadness. Beauty promised she will marry him. Suddenly the Beast's curse broke and he transformed into a handsome young man. Only the love of a maiden willing to accept him as he was could turn him back.

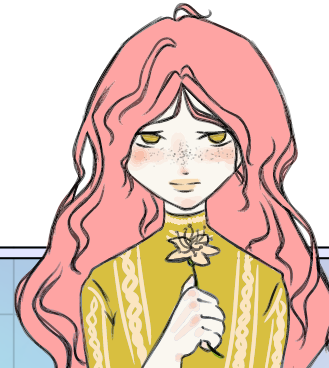
Toxic Masculinity in Beauty and the Beast

Beast holds
Beauty hostage



Beast expects
Beauty to go back to
him even when her
father fell ill , for his
own agenda.

Stockhold Syndrome

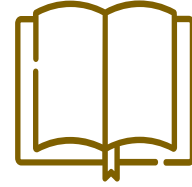


Although Beauty and
the Beast is said to
be the mildest form
of cruel folktales, it
still contains some
toxic masculinity.

These kinds of
teachings are
harmful for boys, as
well as for girls .



Teaching Boys; a Reflection of Society

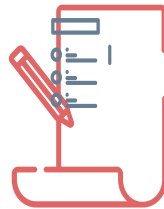


The two stories are only exemplary. There are more children stories that contain toxic masculinity.

-> More than 90 percent of rape cases in Indonesia go unreported, highlighting the country's "deafening silence" around sexual violence as victim blaming is still the culture. (Reuters, 2016)

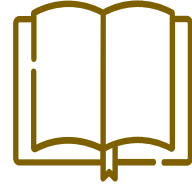
-> There is an urgent need to reconstruct children's stories that better represent boys away from toxic masculinity.

-> Eg. Rara Janitra

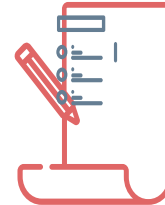




Beauty: A Retelling of the Story of Beauty and the Beast



- Robin McKinley (1978)
- Beauty in that version is not beautiful physically.
- In other versions, the father is portrayed as a weak and selfish person who agrees to sacrifice his daughter because he is a coward. In McKinley's version, however, the father is willing to accept responsibility for his mistakes and take accountability.

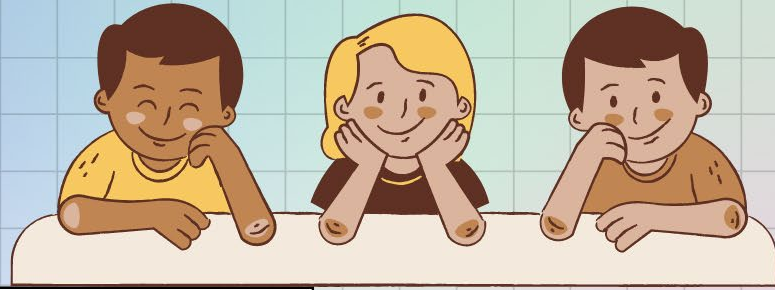


Conclusion



This study concludes that boys urgently need new models of children's stories where they can become non-toxic members of society. Exposing children to gender-balanced stories is therefore very important and highly beneficial for the creation of a balanced society.





**Thank
you!**

