

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Findings Summary

The research finds that the verbal language employed in *Wannakadee Lamanam* portrays gender ideologies in the form of gender stereotypes. For instance, male protagonists are portrayed as rational, adventurous, having initiative etc whereas female protagonists are emotional, expressive and dependent etc. The supporting characters such as parents or grandparents are portrayed with attempts to create equality and eradicate the traditional gender stereotypes. For example, father does not only work outside the house, but also takes part in taking care of the children. At the same time, mother is no longer in the kitchen all the time, but she also participates in activities outside the house and is portrayed side by side with her husband. Moreover, father and mother provide knowledge in the same topic to children. Plus the verbal language such as conjunction or word choice also make male and female characters equal. Even so the gender stereotypes are still strongly inscribed in the characters traits resulting in the inferiority of female characters and it becomes gender bias. Moreover the attempts to provide equality to female characters through elements in verbal language are just superficial and they turn out to be just pseudo-feminism.

Discussion

Children gain their masculine and feminine traits through the process of gender typing. Psychologically, the development of gender-typed behavior may involve the cognitive steps explained by Kohlberg that firstly the children have to understand that being male or female is biologically determined and cannot be changed in any circumstances. And then, according to Raider, children observe male and female adults' behavior and imitate the behavior they believe appropriate for their sex. They tend to repeat that behavior if they are reinforced by adults (Raider, 2004; 64-65).

As a result, from the process of gender typing boys and girls repeat their same sex adults' behavior and the society ends up fixing the stereotype of males and females or the binary opposition gender characteristics. For example, men are rational, adventurous and the financial provider of the family. On the other hand, women are emotional, dependant and the homemaker.

To many, gender ideologies or the set of beliefs and opinions about males and females as well as the purported qualities of masculinity and femininity are socially constructed. The gender role expectation arises from the stereotypical beliefs that assign social roles to man and woman. Gender ideologies influence people's behaviors which later on, become social manner expectations. Stereotypes operate by setting up a self-fulfilling prophecy. For instance, the passive quality of woman may result from the beliefs saying that women have to be passive. After that, women believe it and develop this characteristic. Therefore a certain stereotypical belief may lead males or females to have certain stereotypical behaviors which can be either positive or negative. A positive behavior is the outcome of children's positive expectations, and vice versa (Basow, 1992; 11).

Through the process of socialization, stereotypes are strongly held in society and they become the overgeneralizations about people. The socialization agents such as parents, school, religion and media play important roles in shaping the way people perceive and evaluate others (Basow, 1992; 128). Media portrays the image of males and females as being extremely different, especially in children's T.V. programs: male characters are more likely to be aggressive, productive, direct and helpful and they get rewarded for their actions in the end. On the contrary, females are passive and sedate. Therefore, female characters are ignored while males get all the attention (Basow, 1992; 158).

Powel (1998) finds that the effects of gender bias are most detrimental during the early stages of socialization which mean the pre-schooling and primary schooling periods. In American children's books, girls and women are described with sex-stereotypes and biases. Plus male and female characters are portrayed with

strongly sex-stereotypes and behavior: they participate in activities they regard as appropriate for their gender. Moreover, male characters were visually and verbally more outstanding since they engage in a better and wider ranges of activities than female characters in female activities (Pauwel, 1998; 21-23).

Textbooks are written specifically for children. Not only they are used as learning materials but also as part of socializing agents guiding children to the behavior which is considered appropriate in each society. As said by Raider, the content of textbooks socializes children to fit in one society or culture including encouraging the appropriate behavior and discouraging the unacceptable one (Raider, 2004: 135-136). Textbooks socialize children by portraying male and female characters differently and stereotypically. Boys are active and aggressive and their activities concern work projects and practical jokes. On the other hand, girls' activities are quiet and often associated with emotion. They are often portrayed as friendly, pleasant, kind, timid, fearful, and inactive. They are neither ambitious nor creative. Moreover, the pictures of male characters outnumber women. From the presentation of strict gender-typed manners, it can be confirmed that textbooks are evidence of gender bias. Moreover, as far as boys see themselves in male characters and girls in female, there are possibilities that children will follow their same sex models. Hence, textbooks have a profound implication for gender development of boys and girls (Mussen, Henry and Kagan, 1963; 500).

This problem of gender bias in media seems to be well aware of. In 1992, the Aladdin motion picture was made by Walt Disney. It is said to be the most gender progressive movie ever made. The female protagonist is not blatantly passive, victimized and dependent like those in previous Disney movies such as Snow White and Cinderella. Yet from the study of Marwan M. Kraidy cited in *Postmodernism in the Cinema* edited by Christina Degil-Espostl, this is just another work of pseudo feminism, and the strong and independent characteristics of Jasmine are just superficial. In fact she is still submissive and dependent and Aladdin's text lays the patriarchal subtext. She may appear to be independent on the surface, but actually she still depends on men to get herself out of trouble. For example, she uses her

father's name to force the antagonists to let her go and she needs Aladdin to take her out to show her the whole new world. Aladdin is considered a leader who shows her the world, an educator who opens her eyes and also a sexual stallion who takes her to wonder after wonder. Grammatically speaking, Aladdin is always in the subject position or the doer of the verbs and Jasmin is the object or the receiver of the action. This shows that she is still powerless and depends on men. This movie is an example of the failure to create gender equality at a profound level in media (Degil-Espostl, 1998; 50-53).

All this corresponds to the finding from the study of *Wannakadee Lamnam* textbooks. In Thailand, from the previous study of Worasuda Wattanawong, *The Comparative of Gender Ideologies in Thai Contemporary Children's Books* (2004), male and female characters are described differently. Gender ideologies are underlined throughout the story through verbal and visual language. The roles of parents are also stereotypically assigned. The finding shows the extreme gender bias and gender dichotomy. This work shows that children's literature is considered to be a propagation of gender stereotypes and that gender ideologies are introduced to children from an early age.

The finding from the *Wannakadee Lamnam* textbooks study and the one from Worasuda are slightly different in terms of the attempt to obliterate gender bias and gender ideologies. Superficially, *Wannakadee Lamnam* textbooks try to provide equality to male and female characters and to eradicate the gender bias generally found in Thai society. The equality can be found in the verbal language such as the conjunction "and" and the pronoun "we" indicating the equal status which is often used when males and females are mentioned together especially fathers and mothers, or in young characters such as Maprang and Charlie. The gender stereotypical traits can be seen in opposite gender as well. For instance, Charlie is as emotional as the female characters. He is associated with such emotive words as "miss" or "sad" and female character such as Maprang is shown as being smarter and having more potential than Charlie in one chapter. The most obvious examples of the attempts to create gender equality are from parents and grandparents. The responsibility in

taking care of the children is not limited to the mother anymore. In a family, the father is no longer absent from the story, but exists with the mother all along. The mother has a voice to educate her children in the same subject as the father. She is no longer portrayed with an image of a traditional housewife who knows nothing, but household matters. All male and female characters are allowed to be in the same place and do the same activity and parents treat their sons and daughters equally and give them equal opportunities and encouragement.

Nevertheless, the gender ideologies still prevail in almost every chapter in the form of binary opposites of gender stereotypes. Even though father and mother are presented as equal by verbal language, it is not enough to shift the role completely. The verbal and visual language never shows the father doing the housework and the mother is never presented as the only income provider or family leader. Fathers' responsibilities seem to be more important than mother's such as driving or raising chickens which can be the income of the house. Mother is closely associated to taking care of children. For example, when Charlie thinks about his mother, who appears only through Charlie's thoughts, she brings him food and gives him remarks about his change in behavior. It shows that her duty is taking care of her son and she is so close to him that she can see the changes in him. The verbal language never shows that Charlie associates his well being with his father. In fact, his father is absent in the story. In term of educating children, the mothers may provide educational advice, but they still limited to female area such as singing lullabies or reciting poems. Sometimes, it is the knowledge about the past, such as the story of the mural painting told by the grandmother. Actually the role shifting can be seen more on the father's side: the father joins the literary activities such as teaching his children to recite and sing poems, but the mother never has a chance to take part in the important responsibility such as driving. Moreover, when the father sings the lullaby, the verbal language describes children as being very surprised, so the father leaves this job to the mother. It shows that it is unusual for the father to do activities which are stereotypically female. The boys and girls such as Charlie and Maprang are presented as equals when they work together to form a literature club, but in the end the most important and prestigious job, the president of the club, goes to Charlie

with the vote from every member and Maprang gets a stereotypical female job, a secretary. The fact that everybody votes for Charlie shows that they all have the same gender role expectation. The stereotypes still embedded in activities for boys and girls. The only boy who participates in modern or technology-related activities is Charlie who plays on the computer. The religious or traditional activity always belongs to girls such as Mali who makes garlands to take to the temple or Khampang who prepares food for the monks.

In addition, female characters are described as being attached to the past and tradition. The visual language portrays female characters, both adults and children, in traditional costume whereas male characters, except for Phomklae and the grandfather, always appear in modern clothes. The name of the characters can also indicate the tradition and modernity: boys have modern names such as Dan and Charlie whereas girls' names sound very Thai such as Maprang, Mali and Deun. Sometimes the names that are taken from nature can also indicate ideology such as Mali means jasmine, Maprang means a kind of fruit and Natee means river: Natee sounds strong and wild whereas Mali and Maprang sounds soft and lady like. Plus female characters are related to nature as the verbal language show only females who express their strong feelings towards nature such as "I" in Seetian's Painting and Khampang in Kawao in the City. But there is no verbal language showing that boys talk or are concerned about nature.

This leads to another observation that from the verbal language, the sadness in the textbooks often comes from the separation of mother and a child which sometimes is represented by animals. The verbal language also shows that there are only female characters that show strong feelings towards the separation: For example, "I" in Seetian's Painting and Khampang almost cry when they talk about the animals being killed: "I" talks about a young mother deer and Khampang talks about a mother bird. Both the deer and the bird are killed by the hunter. In The Plai Noi's Journey, almost every girl, including Sarai, the story teller herself, cries when they hear about the separation of Wantong and Plai Noi, but the boys are just quiet. Moreover the different criticism from girls and boys shows that girls are so angry

that they talk with strong anger whereas boys' criticism sounds more rational because they think first before expressing their opinion. Ironically, the boys are those who provide reasons to justify Wantong's actions.

Wannakadee Lamnam textbooks fail to eradicate the gender bias because of gender ideologies which exist in the form of gender stereotypes. These textbooks, just like Aladdin movie, hide the patriarchal subtext. Every female character gains most of her knowledge from her father as seen by the sentence, "my father told me that". Maprang is the only female characters who appear in male space and activities. But it is brief and in order to be there she has to depend on Charlie to gain access to Phomklae. Even when in the chapter she is portrayed as smarter than Charlie, she is still dependent because she has to use Charlie's computer and asks for Phomklae's help. And in the chapter The Plai Noi's Journey, Maprang has a chance to be the president of the club, but the verbal language shows that it is Charlie who grants her this opportunity to do the job. Plus the Sarai's impressive performance comes from her father's teaching. It can also be observed that male characters have a wider range of potential. They are not only good in their stereotypical field such as having responsibility or being adventurous in their activities but they are good in the female's field as well. Fathers know about poems and literature. They can even teach it to their daughters such as the fathers of Sarai and "I" in The Bantams. Yod and Kriengkrai are as good as Sarai in the literature presentation. On the other hand, females' activities are still limited to the literary area. The only female character who is portrayed with another kind of potential is Maprang in Literature Fan Club who can comes up with the name and the promotion plan for the club. Nonetheless, her potential is not enough to grant her a better job than being a secretary. In addition, the nature of the secretary job is about responding to the order from the boss or the president. This work allows no creativity and by associating a girl to this kind of work, along with other female characters whose potential is limited to repeating and reciting poems, gender bias indicating that girls have limited potentials and that they are not capable to do important jobs is even more emphasized.

The stereotype may not be true for a group as a whole: every girl cannot be all passive and not every boy in the world is adventurous. Nonetheless, the media chooses to present only the stereotypical image of males and females and ignores individual's differences. It has been noticed that stereotypes are over-simplified systems which may result in the situation where males or females are unfairly treated due to the oversimplified beliefs about typical males and females. The negative consequence of the over-simplification can be called a specific term, discrimination. The feminist asserts that the gender bias is the fact that one gender, most often males, is preferred over another resulting in the discrimination against women in society. By exploring verbal and nonverbal language, it is possible to understand how gender bias is present and carries on in the community (Marinova, 2003; 2-3).

From the study of *Wannakadee Lamnam* textbooks, language reflects gender bias in Thai society which exists in the form of gender stereotype. This shows that gender stereotypes have become self-fulfilling prophecy which will result in the continuance of gender bias in the society. Even worse, since textbooks are one type of socializing agent, if children believe in those stereotypical traits and adopt them, gender bias will persevere in the society: girls will always be passive, emotional and dependent. As a result, they will always be treated with bias. Boys will always be those who get better jobs and better opportunities not because they are actually better in their performance, but just because they are males.

Schooling period is crucial in children life. Everything that happens during this period may have effects one way or another in their lives. Among every kind of media, textbooks are the most important because of the fact that they are used as part of the study. Unlike other kinds of media which are optional and children can avoid, all students are exposed to the content in the textbooks as part of their education. The content in the textbooks is taken by the students as general and ultimate truth. It is as real as the fact in the lesson itself. Thus when the study shows that there are attempts in Thai school textbooks to eradicate the gender stereotype or gender bias and create more gender equality, this shows that the problem of gender bias is well

aware of. Yet the attempts fail and gender ideologies still prevail. These textbooks have still been written in the ways that guide children into the accepted behavior in the society. Since *Wannakadee Lamnam* textbooks portray male and female characters with gender-typed traits, this shows that the author still believes that these stereotypical traits are something to be appreciated and adopted. Therefore they should be preserved, through the socializing agent, so that the students can maintain these traits with the belief that these gender stereotypes can help maintain harmony in society.

From the words of King Rama the sixth which are mentioned in the textbooks study of Nidhi Eoseewong, “the government has power to shape people’ behavior by writing textbooks for students...therefore the price of textbooks are not expensive at all” (46), the quotation shows that the intention of textbook is to create the appropriate behavior for children. From the study, the appropriate behavior also includes gender behavior. It should be observed that the writers of the textbooks are those who make decision about what is appropriate or inappropriate behavior. Thus what is proper for them in terms of gender behavior is based on the condition of the society in their generation. And the world has changed and one appropriate behavior may not be appropriate anymore these days. By implying in the characters traits that females should be passive and emotional will do nothing but aggravate the gender bias or gender discrimination in society. The gender stereotype is an overgeneralization. It is dehumanizing because boys and girls are perceived like objects produced from the factory which have no differences. Yet actually, everybody has an identity and they are unique in their own ways. By imposing the gender stereotypes in the textbooks, students believe in those gender ideologies and adopt what they believe to be appropriate for them. Consequently, boys will forget that they can cry and hug their mothers and their activities can be going to the temple. Girls will think that they cannot be the president of the club or leader of the group and it is normal for them to cry and run for help from adults. The textbooks create what children believe to be the ultimate truth and when they adopt this behavior, the gender bias will persist in society. It is a good sign to see attempts to provide equality to males and females in *Wannakadee Lamnam* textbooks, but in

order to make it really work, children should be taught that it is not necessary for them to follow the stereotypes and there should be room available for them as boys to experience and adopt female traits if they want to and vice versa.



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