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Paper: Equity

The (de) construction of gender identity in children's literature written in English by Sri Lankan authors

This research paper is an exploration of the construction of gender identity in selected texts written in English for children by Sri Lankan authors. The research draws from selected novels published since 2006: *Mythil's Secret* by Prashani Rambukwella, *Paduma Meets the Sunbird* by Nihal de Silva and *Mona's Mission Impossible* by Razana Sameem. The books include male and female child protagonists and are contributions of both male and female authors.

The primary objective of this research is to deconstruct the construction of gender identity of children portrayed in children's literature written in English, by Sri Lankan authors. As identity is a 'dynamic, shifting, continuous, socio cultural process' (Singer & Singer, 2001:310) [1] and gender is 'not something one is, it is something one does'(Salih, 2006: 55)[2], defining gender identity is crucial in the developing years of a child. This study takes an interdisciplinary approach utilizing mainly feminist and psychoanalytic theories along with Charles Cooley's concept of the 'looking glass self'.

Input derived from interviews conducted with children, authors and the publisher are incorporated into the study. The selected texts attempt to fill a void in English literature in Sri Lanka for pre and early teenagers and this study addresses the gap in research conducted in this particular field. The novelty of the research stems from addressing these concerns through focusing on the construction of gender identity based on a broader understanding of gender equality. The paper addresses the need for the construction of a gender identity that is unique to Sri Lanka and sheds light on perceptions that girls and boys may have in identifying themselves in relation to each other and their respective gender roles. This in turn may have implications on the development of the child reader and his/her understanding of gender identity.

Keywords: Children's literature, Construction, Gender identity, Gender equality, Gender role

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[1] Singer, D. G., & Singer, J. L. (2001). *Handbook of Children and the Media.* USA: Sage Publications.

[2] Salih, Sara. (2006). *On Judith Butler and Performativity.* Georgetown University. Retrieved from.. http://www9.georgetown.edu/faculty/irvinem/theory/Salih-Butler-Performativity-Chapter_3.pdf